Chapter 7

Resurrection:

“You were so I am”
Resurrection: ‘You were so I am’

The daughter’s quest for the absent mother, in order to resurrect her, to give her back her voice has been one of the major emerging themes of feminist writing today. The gynocritics have fallen back on women figures, marginalised and unheard of, and have tried to put them back into the mainstream. The movement is not only literary but also political, as well as personal in nature. To fall back upon one’s literary mother is to rediscover one’s own self, to understand one’s own roots, to familiarize oneself with the meaning of womanhood. The process of resurrecting the mother cannot bypass the self, because for the daughter it is a process of trans-creation, a celebration of her own creative spirit. The present chapter is devoted to this theme as its finds it place in some of the fin de siecle Women’s writing in India.

Section I: The Binding Vine

Urmi – Mira

In Shashi Deshpande’s The Binding Vine, Urmila’s endeavour to dive deep into the spirit of her mother-in-law represents the search (a la Alice Walker) into the ‘mother’s garden’. It is a quest for the lost voice of the poet in Mira who lived and died without recognition. Armed with a treasure casket – a black steel trunk handed over to her by Akka – Urmila dives back into the past. The books, diaries, a file where Mira neatly copied her poems and the photographs help Urmila to understand her long-dead mother-in-law. In the process of examining the documents a deep bond is established between the
two, a bond that gradually spreads its tentacles in Urmī’s mind. Mira, who is known just as Kishore’s mother to everyone else, acquires a palpable and vibrant existence in Urmī’s consciousness.

Rummaging through Mira’s diaries, the first page of which contains the message, ‘strictly private and confidential’ (Deshpande, Binding Vine 51), Urmī thinks about sharing them with Kishore. But she soon gives up the idea realising that even if Kishore is Mira’s son, this very special communication between the two women across the generational gap can not be shared with Kishore. The diaries are a message from Mira’s private self and Urmī has to hesitate before crossing the threshold: “And I find myself hesitant to trespass, to violate her privacy, to lay bare her tragic story” (Deshpande, Binding Vine 51). But even before going through what she writes Urmī can put herself in Mira’s position and watch her childishly splashing water sitting by a stream, posing a radiant smile for the camera. She can find Mira in her act of writing, copying quotations neatly, scrawling notes in the margins – sometimes putting down some personal comments, neatly arranging her file of poems; enjoying the physical sensation of writing. There seems to be an interesting dichotomy in what she writes. While all her diaries are written in English, her poems are all composed in Kannad. Her mind too seems to be neatly organised like her writings.

As Urmī goes through Mira’s work, she can reconstruct the young girl, who had aspired to be a poet. The arrival of a promising young poet Venu, visiting her school, was an important event in Mira’s life.
One of the boys asked him why he chose the name Venu for himself. ‘Because,’ he said, ‘I am that, a flute. The creator of the music is someone else, I am only an instrument.’ And how strange, he didn’t sound humble when he said that, he sounded almost arrogant. How proudly he declared, ‘I am only an instrument!’ He read out two of his poems. I’ve written them down so I won’t forget. Each time I read them, I am filled with awe. Will I ever be able to write like this? Today, after hearing him, I know this is what I want – to be able to write like this. But I can’t believe I ever can. And, thank God, I never say this aloud. They will laugh at me, I can imagine how they will, I can hear him laughing (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 65-66).

In spite of her uncertainty about her writing prowess, Mira takes hesitant, faltering steps towards her goal. On her thirteenth birthday, she writes about three little girls playing the game of make believe. Jyotsna is their stem leader, whereas Sobha cannot be serious at all. She repeatedly bursts into laughter while the other two try to control her. The description is vivid and Mira concludes, “I write about them and the moment is forever” (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 65). Reading these lines, Urmi can relive the entire scene – the girls sitting on the bed dangling their legs, Mira sitting on a chair in her crumpled home-wear – and finds her to be already a writer. Urmi finds how the word ‘forever’ brings out Mira’s aspiration to reach the eternal and yet how hesitant her steps are.
‘Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm
will I emerge a beauteous being?
Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist?’ (Deshpande, Binding Vine 65)

However, it is more than a glimpse into her attempts at becoming a writer that Urmila unearths. Looking at a family photograph she sees Mira’s mother in a somewhat awkward state for having to come to the stage. But looking at her father Urmila wonders if Mira was her father’s pet? Urmi discovers that the Golden Treasury in Mira’s trunk was her father’s gift. Urmi speculates if the gift was for Mira’s intelligence or if Mira’s father was really aware of her stealthy shy ventures at creativity.

The image of happiness that emerges out from the early writings, various photographs etc. does not last long. Urmila realises, Mira was also as unfortunate as Kalpana (as discussed in Chapter 6) and met the same fate. In her case it was only under the garb of marriage. A poem describing a marriage ceremony and comparing the bridegroom and bride to Laxmi-Narayan, catches this mood of Mira. It begins joyfully enough,

Oh, look at them, the women cried
with knowing looks and teasing eyes (Deshpande, Binding Vine 48)

But the final stanza brings out her fear of plunging into sexuality with an unknown man.

But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too
twist brocade tassels round her fingers
and tremble, fearing the coming
of the dark-clouded, engulfing night? (Deshpande, Binding Vine 66)

Her diaries echo her poem where her revulsion against compulsive sex which has been enforced by marriage finds vivid expression.

And so it begins. ‘Please’, he says, ‘please, I love you.’ And over and over again until he has done, ‘I love you’. Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say ‘no’ at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all.

What is it he wants from me? I look at myself in the mirror and wonder, what is there in me? Why does it have to be me? Why can’t he leave me alone? (Deshpande, Binding Vine 67)

Mira’s anguish finds expression in Shakutai’s voice, when she asks why it has to be her daughter. Probably, the same question haunts Urmila as well.

Why it has to be with her? Why it has to be Anu?

Urmila discovers the suppressed and repressed rebel in Mira. Mira brought up in a traditional way was taught to obey and respect her husband without any grudge.

Don’t tread paths barred to you
obey, never utter a ‘no’;
submit and your life will be
a paradise, she said and blessed me. (Deshpande, Binding Vine 83)

But Mira outgrows the dictum. She learns to utter the dreaded ‘no’. If she has to submit, it is not a wilful submission; the tormentor has to achieve it by force.

Kishore is born out of the rape of her mother.

no, growing painfully within

like a monster child was born. (Deshpande, Binding Vine 83)

The connection between Mira the poet and the historical Mirabai becomes obvious at this point. Mirabai, one of the most accomplished of poets was a worshipper of Lord Krishna, whom she regarded as her lover, her husband.

The attempt to tie her to the earthly plane through the marital route proved futile as she also had the courage to reject her husband whom she had never accepted. Urmila not only learns about Mira’s fears and dreads, her steely futile protests and frustrated resistance; she applies them in her own life as well. When Kishore, a sailor by profession, remains distant from her even during his short stay, Urmila in spite of her fears never submits. She is the opposite of Mira in her attitude to love. Mira squirms at the mention of the word, Urmila cannot do without it. But both of them are true to their feelings and are not ready to submit. Even when Urmila feels longings stirring within, she resists herself.

... I want to submit too. But I know that if I walk the way of submission once, I will walk that way forever. Yet I never ask him ‘why?’, when he goes away from me even in our few days
together, I never reveal my hurt, my longing to keep him by my
side... (Deshpande, Binding Vine 82)

Urmila, who had once visited the house where Mira stayed, now relives
her experience as she again travels with her writer mother-in-law. She
remembers the gutter running by the side of the house, the stone slab over it –
a bridge at the entrance, the hall where they waited and most vividly a small
room at the corner with a skylight with roofs abysmally low even for a child.
And in the room where women were kept sequestered for three days Urmila
visualises Mira in an old sari, sitting on the floor, her hair dishevelled fearing
her touch might pollute the children who rushed in through the window – “My
companion for three days, window in the corner room” (Deshpande, Binding
Vine 98) – she looks at the street outside bustling with life. This is a room
where Mira could be her own self. As Virginia Woolf in her essay “A Room of
One’s Own” clamours for a space for the woman writer, Mira too must have
felt the need of a space that remained inviolate. And even if physical space is
unavailable she can create a mental space of her own by withdrawing from the
world in general.

Shall I surrender to this Maya-world
dancing peacock, displaying its feathers?

Or shall I, defying the market world
retreat into my shell tortoise-like? (Deshpande, Binding Vine 98)

Mira’s retreat from the busy everyday world is not an escape from life;
rather it is a venture into a life that is less ordinary. She well understands what
the ‘Maya-world’ holds for her and makes up her mind to escape it. She seems to be eccentric to others, but she hardly cares. Rather she looks at the daily, mundane world from her vantage point and feels reassured about the richness of her inner world.

They called me mad
they, who cocooned themselves
in bristly blankets
and thought themselves warm
when I spoke of my soul
that boiled and seethed.

They called me mad
they, who were entranced
by a single white ray of life
when I spoke of the music
of the seven colours in a prism. (Deshpande, Binding Vine 99-100)

Like Kamala Das’s poetry, here is a dialogic between ‘I’ and ‘they’ in which the former has to assert her identity and voice, against the countless odds as epitomized by the voice/s of ‘they’. To understand this world of Mira, Urmila has to go through her diaries. Urmila, at first deciding not to encroach upon the privacy of her deceased mother-in-law, thinks of leaving aside the diaries. But like all early woman writers Mira’s life is her art and separating the two becomes impossible. The diaries and the poems lead up to and embrace
one another; they are in a sense complementary. Reading Mira’s writing
Urmila concludes that Mira’s life at her in-law’s house was, to say the least,
lonely. The same feeling she finds in her friend Vanaa when the latter breaks
into a sob on seeing Urmii the first time after her marriage. She does not
complain about her in-laws but her expressions obviously betray her
uneasiness. The same tone of disappointment is discovered in Mira’s poem by
Urmii.

As if born blind, I grope
finding my way in a new world
touching things feeling them
oh, what is this, so strange and new? (Deshpande, Binding Vine
100)

Mira illustrates the post-marital trauma that assaults the new wife. “In the
solitude of her new home, bound to a man who is more or less a stranger to
her, no longer a child but a wife and destined to become a mother in her turn,
she feels a chill...” (Beauvoir 477). Even if Mira has to inhabit this strange,
new world she is not ready to accept the new norms. She has learnt to say ‘no’
to her husband’s blunt physical oppression; now she can reject the new
identity being thrust on her. But her protest can be voiced only in her poetry,
and thus she sublimates her lonely suffering into heart. She writes, stealthily of
course:

A glittering ring gliding on the rice
carefully traced a name ‘Nirmala’.
Who is this? None but I,
my name hence, bestowed upon me.

Nirmala, they call, I stand statue-still.

Do you build the new without razing the old?

A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold

can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira. (Deshpande, Binding Vine 101)

The finality with which she proclaims her identity is remarkable. ‘I am Mira’ is not only the assertion of her name, of what she remains to herself, but it is also an assertion of her poetic self; it is almost as arrogant as the poet Venu asserting his name.

The identity that Mira seeks is obviously not what she was born with. She questions her mother’s life and finds it is not her mother that she wants to be. Mira writes about the visit of an astrologer in her home. Everyone’s horoscope is studied and interpreted except her mother’s. Mira asks her mother if she does not want to know her future. She replies each of their fortunes taken together make up her own. Mira is not so certain about her mother’s views and wonders if she would also turn out to be like her mother.

Did she really mean that? Will I become that way too, indifferent to my own life, thinking it nothing? I don’t want to. I won’t. I think so now, but may be my mother thought like me when she was
my age. It frightens me. No, it doesn’t, I’ll never think my life, myself nothing, never (Deshpande, Binding Vine 101).

But the oscillation in her mind is soon to stop. Like all daughters Mira too does not want to be portrayed in her mother’s image.

To make myself in your image was never the goal I sought (Deshpande, Binding Vine 124)

Mira fears the same entrapment that Irigaray speaks of, “I look at myself in you, you look at yourself in me” (Irigaray, “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other” 61). The daughter fears of being caught in the mother’s image, of not being able to establish her individual identity, of not being regarded as a distinct self. The petrifying image of the mother where she is seen as the nourisher and the caretaker is one of the most enigmatic images that haunt mother-daughter relationship.

You take care of me, you keep watch over me. You want me always in your sight in order to protect me. You fear that something will happen to me. Do you fear that something will happen? But what could happen that would be worse than the fact of my lying supine day and night? Already full grown and still in the cradle. Still dependant upon someone who carries me, who nurses me. Who carries me? Who nurses me? (Irigaray, “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other” 60-61)

Mira too poses the same question, though somewhat differently. The ‘supine’ nature of the daughter is reflected in imitating the mother blindly, in being “full
grown and still in the cradle". Mira, whose body revolts against sexual
advances and whose mind is intellectually alert, cannot obviously afford to be
a mere shadow of her mother or the unsubstantial shadowy stature to which
her mother had been forced to reduce herself.

Even when sporting radiant green, symbol of her blossoming fertility,
standing before her mother as part of the child-bearing ritual, she is not joyous.

Silver toe-rings twinkle on my toes
silver anklets tinkle as I walk
but, oh mother, I stumble, I fall
my arms sink heavily by my sides. (Deshpande, Binding Vine
125)

Urmila can easily identify with the fearful anticipation of Mira and even the
proud feeling of her mother as she had performed the same ritual for her friend
Vanaa as the daughter-in-law of the house. But whereas Vanaa is radiant with
joy, Mira sinks from the situation. It may be that she is not happy since the
child is not born of a joyous union. But there can be more to it than the obvious.
Mira probably cannot reconcile to the ordinary life of wifehood, child rearing,
motherly obligations. The child she feared would put her in a state of mundane
housekeeper which she so much detested. After her mother's death Mira
thinks of a question that she could never put before her mother and must now
remain unanswered.

They all think I am grieving because I could not meet her before
she died. Am I? Yes, I am. But there is more. I wish I could have
asked her a question. 'Mother', I always wanted to ask, 'Why do you want me to repeat your history when you so despair of your own?' (Deshpande, Binding Vine 126)

But Mira realises finally the grim lesson: however hard one may try there can be no escape.

*Whose face is this I see in the mirror,*

*unsmiling, grave, bedewed with fear?*

*The daughter? No, Mother, I am now your shadow.* (Deshpande, Binding Vine 126)

Irigaray too views herself to be the reflection of her mother. "If I leave, you lose the reflection of life, of your life" (Irigaray, “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other” 66). Her desire to escape becomes palpable when she utters “I’ll leave us... I’ll live my life, my story” (Irigaray, “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other” 66).

Mira too wants ‘a story of her own’. She compiles her thoughts and feelings, gives them the artistic aesthetic shape, but ironically her poetry can never see the light of the day. They remain huddled in the trunk, buried as the memories of Mira herself are. But when Umii fumbles through her writings she feels the odd sensation as if Mira was communicating to her, pressing her to do something important; but she fails to decipher the exact message.

But when I read Mira’s papers, something comes through. It’s like a message being tapped on the wall by the prisoner in the
next cell. She’s trying to say something. What is it? (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 115)

Urmila can visualise her mother-in-law’s precarious state as she lives with a man she cannot love, with a family where she is a misfit and realises how lucky she herself has been. She wonders how Mira could go on with her life. The answer, Urmi finds, lies in her creative pursuit which was just not a passion for Mira but also an escape route from mundane reality.

Perhaps it was her writing that kept her going, that kept her alive. When and where did she write? Certainly she could never have had, in that house, a room of her own. Except at night. Yes, I imagine it was there that she wrote, late at night, soundlessly getting out of bed, sitting down on the floor by the window perhaps, forgetting everything while she wrote (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 127) [Emphasis added].

Mira’s position is quite akin to the African slave mothers who according to Tooner, were “the mule of the world” (quoted in Walker 178). Their rich inner life did not find any expression outside because of the immense subjugation they had to endure. But this did not deter them from pouring out their creative instincts in their lullabies, charcoal drawings, and dances. They learnt to detach their minds from the sufferings they faced. Without having control over their own bodies they could hardly ever dream of venting their creativity. Mira too has no control over her own body, has no way to address
an audience; she can only tuck away her writings in diaries marked "Strictly private and confidential" (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 40).

Walker speaks about the Afro-American writer Phillis Wheatley, a slave in the 1700s, whose importance lies "not so much in what you sang, as that you kept alive, in so many of our ancestors, the notion of song" (Walker 181). In Mira’s case it is not only “the notion of song” that is important but “what she sang” is equally vital for her professed ambition of being a poet. More importantly her poems are an expression of her innermost feelings, dreams, fears and aspirations as a woman. Like the Afro-American slave mothers Mira too is equally a slave; the “ideology of Indian womanhood” (a la M.N. Roy) necessarily reduced her from the wife – daughter in law – mother – to the status of domestic slave or chattel. She has to follow its dicta. Even her childhood idol, the poet Venu, is not sympathetic. When she meets him with some samples of poetry, he dismisses the concept of a woman poet. One is reminded of Robert Southey’s advice to Charlotte Bronte:

…but there is a danger of which I would, with all kindness and all earnestness warn you. The day dreams in which you habitually indulge are likely to induce a distempered state of mind and, in proposition as all the ordinary uses of the world seem to you flat and unprofitable, you will be unfitted for them without becoming fitted for anything else. Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be (Manley and Belcher 117).
This social code proves to be disastrous for Mira. Whereas Venu is regarded to be a noted poet in the later years Mira's name simply disappears. Alice Walker foregrounds the task before the daughters in clear terms. She says that the challenge is to discover the anonymous creator who could be a mother in the creative tradition, who “left her mark in the only materials, she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use” (Walker 182). Urmila too, like Walker, ventures into the same act, the act of resurrecting the mother. And now the message of Mira seems to be loud and clear.

And Mira...? The tapping on the wall is finally beginning to make sense. Something comes through when I think of Venu's poems everywhere and Mira's voice silenced (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 128).

Urmila decides to publish Mira's works, so that she too could have a 'story of her own'.

But it would be wrong to assume that it is Urmila who controls the whole relationship. As things progress the relationship turns otherwise round. As Urmila comes to the end of Mira's poem she feels a pang in her heart for an impending parting but soon realises that there can be no escape from Mira. The cycle here turns full circle – as Mira failed to free herself from the image of her mother – Urmila too can never free herself from the haunting shadow of her mother-in-law.
...I’ve come to the end of Mira’s poems. This has been like a parting too. And yet it is no parting, because Mira in some strange way stays with me, I know she will never go. All these days I have been imagining myself the hunter and Mira my prey; I have been filled with the excitement of the hunter each time I approached her. Suddenly our relationship has changed. It is Mira who is now taking me by the hand and leading me...

Where? I don’t know, I have no idea what lies at the end of this remarkable journey, but on the way I have seen Kishore (Deshpande, Binding Vine 135).

The missing link Urmi finds out has been a poem about Kishore, a man connected to both of them. Mira died giving birth to her child; she had no scope of knowing what her son would be like. But she writes about her son in her womb and by the tone and tenor of the poem Urmila concludes that the last few months must have been tranquil if not peaceful for Mira. The poem hastily composed on the scrap of paper demonstrates her joyous optimism. It is the last of her poems, her last bit of communication to Urmi.

Tiny fish swimming in the ocean of my womb
my body thrills to you;
churning the ocean, shaking distant shores
you will emerge one day.

Lightning flashed through the front door
and I who was stone quivered.
Bridging the two worlds, you awaken in me
a desire for life.

Desire, says the Buddha, is the cause of grief;
but how escape this cord
this binding vine of love? Fear lies coiled within
this womb-piercing joy.

Smiling and joyful, Kama tore off his armour,
his body trailed blood.
Will that courage be mine when, denuded,

I stand naked and bare? (Deshpande, Binding Vine 136-137)

This poem that registers at least some genuine 'joy of motherhood' has its positive impact on Urmi. As she says, it "has cleared my emotional life, swept away the confusing tangle of cobwebs" (Deshpande, Binding Vine 137).

Urmila realises that Mira too, like her, knew the value of love, love which helps one to cling to someone else, love which provides an anchor to one in this world where we find ourselves to be strangers. But love also makes us vulnerable. To bare one's soul completely needs courage and strength and most people lack that. Urmila carefully examines her relationship with Kishore whom she has known from her childhood days. When she began reading Mira, she felt how much easier life has been with herself. Yet when analysing her relationship with Kishore in the light of Mira's poems she finds that her love
with her husband has only been physical. Kishore has only been too vulnerable to put off his armour and lay himself bare. The intimacy, the deep communication that love desires has been missing.

Yes, here it is, the knowledge I spared myself then.

Kishore will never remove his armour, there is something in him I will never reach. I have lived with the hope that some day I will.

Each relationship, always imperfect, survives on hope. Am I to give up this hope? Is this what Mira is offering me? (Deshpande, Binding Vine 141)

What is fascinating is that in course of discovering the mother, the daughter discovers her own self. The mother and the daughter figures are so intricately bound that their lives begin to mirror each other. Even if this causes temporary hiccups in their quest for individual identities, the mirroring nevertheless provides the platform where the two can meet, share and understand each other.

Section II: Small Remedies

Savitribai – Madhu:

Small Remedies may well be regarded in the light of ‘biographies’. The daughter’s attempt to recreate the mother, to give her a new lease of life is also perceptible in Madhu’s relationship with Savitribai in Shashi Deshpande’s Small Remedies. However, unlike the previous relationship between Urmi and Mira, this relationship proves to be much more complex. Probably, the reason
behind it is that this association is not one-dimensional like the previous one.
Contrasted to Mira, who is dead and can only speak through her writings,
Savitribai has her own ego and perceptions about her own self. Being a
celebrated artist, Bai can often dictate terms of the relationship between
herself and Madhu.

Commissioned to write a biography of the doyen of Carnatic music,
Madhu steps into the house of Bai, hoping to rekindle the relationship between
them on the basis of her friendship with Munni. However, Savitribai is in no
mood to oblige her daughter’s friend and she refuses to acknowledge any
connection with her new biographer. She meets Madhu on a fresh territory,
unburdened with the luggage of the past. She treats her daughter’s friend
professionally, as her biographer, as if without any connection to her
whatsoever. Madhu suffering from her own grief finds this new found position
of hers to be reassuring as she too can shed her identity of the bereaved
mother.

By making a stranger of me, she’s unburdened us of our past.
We’re meeting on fresh territory, with no luggage to clutter up
the space we’re inhabiting. This is an entirely new relationship.
In this avatar, as the writer of her biography, I’m very welcome
in her home (Deshpande, Small Remedies 58).

Obviously this attempt on Bai’s part not to acknowledge Madhu is a way
of denying her past, denying her daughter, Munni. Madhu too is comfortable with
the arrangement initially as it helps her own psychic situation. However, her
role as a biographer compels her to search into the relationship between the 
mother and the daughter. Since, Madhu can no longer write a ‘hagiography’ of 
Savitribai as she did in the case of Hamidbhai; she has no option but to look 
into the emotional aspect of Bai. Her effort is to capture Bai in her entirety, to 
capture her true self. It is not only Bai’s career under the flashbulbs, but her 
hidden self away from the public gaze with its sacrifices, grief and guilt, in 
short her humane self that is going to be the chief concern of Madhu. She is 
about to remake Savitribai not simply as a doyen of Indian classical music, but 
as a suffering woman, above all a mother. Madhu, therefore questions 
whether Bai has actually forgotten Munni for ever, if she has put her daughter 
into oblivion away from the recesses of memory.

But something tells me that this is not the truth. I’ve been 
here, with Bai, long enough to know that. Bai’s forgetting, I think, 
is deliberate. She has drawn a line through Munni’s and Ghulam 
saab’s names and erased them from her life. This is something 
she did long back, when she turned to respectability, when she 
began her journey to success and fame (Deshpande, Small 
Remedies 154).

The woman in Savitribai becomes increasingly enigmatic to the narrator 
of her life, Madhu. It is as if Madhu puts herself into the shoes of Savitribai’s 
daughter and tries to discover the mother in Bai. She tries to find out what has 
gone into the making of Savitribai. And it is this quest which sets her apart.
Like Alice Walker, Madhu also is in a quest, the quest for the ‘mother’. But
whereas Walker searches for the literary mother, the ordinary woman who
dared to venture into the cultural arena, Madhu’s search is for the ordinary self
of an extra-ordinary woman. Her attempt is almost in the tradition of the writing
of the ‘biographies’ where a special dimension of a woman’s biography is
recorded by another woman. Madhu realises that Savitribai’s achievement as
an artist is well chronicled or would find mention in many a work; but the real
person – the woman, the mother, the lover – would always remain behind our
eyes. Her endeavour therefore is to venture into the personal aspect of
Savitribai’s life and give us a glimpse of a woman, a mother with whom others
may connect.

...I have to push my way out of them and get to the woman
herself. The complex, complicated human being who comes to
me through her words. It’s with words that she builds a huge
cutout of an artist, a musician, barring my view of the human
being behind it. There are times when she falters and then, like
seeing the eyes of a burqa-cloaked woman through the eye-slits,
I get a sudden glimpse of a human being behind that shield. It’s
this darkness that interests and tantalizes me; I know it’s in this
darkness that the woman I want resides. Her silences about her
personal life, about her life with her husband, with her lover, her
muteness about the hardships she suffered as a woman who
flouted the rules of society – these are what link her to that
woman (Deshpande, Small Remedies 176-177).
Madhu in her new found role as a ‘daughter’ of Bai must interpret Savitribai in a different way. She must look beyond the picture that Bai likes to present to the world and reconstrue Bai’s role as a mother. This is in fact a creative process where the daughter must endeavour to discover the mother, thus keeping the creative process alive. That Madhu hardly remembers her own mother is significant. The mother figure is to her a *tabula rosa*, a blank slate on which she can scribble.

It’s becoming increasingly clear to me that I cannot keep myself out of this book of Bai’s, that I cannot be the invisible narrator. The child who knew Bai, the girl who knew Munni, the woman who is constantly aware of Bai’s blanketing of Munni’s name – they are part of the book, they will be part of Bai’s story; it cannot be avoided. And the words will be mine (Deshpande, *Small Remedies* 162).

Madhu in her book aims to give Savitribai a new lease of life, nay immortality if only she is ready to make a small sacrifice by recognising her daughter. This phenomenon is akin to Alice Walker’s call in the essay “In Search of Her Mother’s Garden”, where the daughter’s job is to identify the creative mother and the tradition she leaves behind. Madhu feels Savitribai’s creativity can be best recognised if only her lineage can be well established. If Savitribai is to adorn the mantle of the primal literary/cultural mother she must at first establish herself as a mother in the true sense.
If Bai wants to live through this book, I can give her the immortality she desires. Yet there is a price she will have to pay: the daughter she denies, the daughter whose existence she has obliterated (so successfully, that I have seen only one mention of her in a Marathi magazine, and that, only a sentence), this daughter will be part of her life again. Why, when she had the courage to walk out on her marriage and family, is she so frightened of revealing the existence of her child? She gave the child the name 'Indorekar' – the name she adopted as a singer (from her mother’s home town Indore) – not compromising either her maiden name or her married one. Meenakshi Indorekar. Marking her out as her child alone, not the child of her marriage, not the child of her lover. This surely is a statement I cannot ignore? (Deshpande, *Small Remedies* 168-169)

Whatever may be the demand of Madhu, Bai is surely in no mood to oblige. In her quest for respectability Savitribai seems to have obliterated her daughter altogether.

But such obliteration can only be imposed from the outside world, from the public face that Bai loves to put forth before the world. This face is all made up, ready for public viewing. But once she sheds her outward self she appears naked and vulnerable inside. The presence of her daughter is very much in her consciousness, a presence which never allows her to come face
to face with her true self. In one of her unguarded moments she makes her
confession to Madhu:

'It was hard, I can tell you. I could have taken the easy
way out. I was young and good-looking – and in those days, it
wouldn't have been considered very wrong if I had allowed a
man to help me. It was done in my profession, it was often done
by women. And, after all, people talked about you whatever you
did. I could as well have done the things they said I was doing.
But I didn't, I never took that road' (Deshpande, *Small
Remedies* 214-215).

This confession to her reveals her loyalty to her lover, that in spite of all the
temptations and lure for easy success she never succumbed. But it also
reveals her despair for respectability, her desire to be pure in the eyes of the
audience. Perhaps it was a compulsion on her part that she should renounce
her lover and her daughter as they seemed to be the only hindrance to her
cherished goal. The confession to Madhu is in fact a revelation of her feelings
for her daughter though not stated in explicit terms. Madhu herself realises the
change in Bai's attitude, her casual behaviour giving way to a much more
affectionate tone.

This is a confession I never expected, it's a revelation,
almost for the first time, of what there is behind the façade. It
tells me what I've already noticed, that there is a quickening of
our relationship, a change from its earlier static condition. She
calls me Madhu, she speaks more familiarly to me, and gives me a feeling of being less guarded. I sense her reserve falling off (Deshpande, Small Remedies 215).

The recognition on part of Savitribai of the identity of Madhu is in a sense the recognition of the ‘daughter’ in Madhu, the daughter who is in quest of the mother. Simultaneously it may also be considered that in a sense it is recognition of her own daughter, Munni, as well though she still does not mention her name. In accepting the name of Madhu she gives her the right to be her literary daughter, who can construct her life according to her own observations and realisations. Such a freedom to Madhu is not only the way of immortalising oneself, but also realising her relationship with Munni through the bondage of words, a bondage which even blood failed to provide.

Section III: The God of Small Things

Ammu – Rahel:

The mother daughter relationship in The God of Small Things is different from the ones discussed earlier as the daughter recreates the mother more out of a cathartic necessity than a desire for creation. It is almost a therapeutic escape for the daughter who can only overcome the trauma she carries by identifying with her mother. The narrator of this novel is Rahel, who looks back at her experiences over an eventful fortnight twenty-three years ago. Rahel, now thirty-one, is of the same age as her mother, Ammu, when she died. The time gap between the events and their recollection obviously
results in a multiple narrative focus from the temporal point. Looking back for Rahel is a sort of liberating experience. She reconstructs her childhood but looks at the time from an adult perspective. Shapes, patterns and designs of human and social behaviour responsible for blotting out the innocence in her, which were incomprehensible to her as a child, now fall into place. She embarks on a journey to the past, a journey on which she has to rediscover and recreate her long-lost mother. But it is a voyage in which she is not alone; she is accompanied by her twin-brother Estha, eighteen minutes senior to her in this world.

However, Rahel and Estha are no ordinary brother-sister pair. Though they are 'two-egg twins – Dizygotic', and do not resemble each other physically as many twins do, they are inseparable on a more fundamental level.

The confusion lay in a deeper, more secret place.

In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was For Ever, Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities (Roy, God of Small Things 2)

The twin's identification with each other gives a special twist to the narrative pattern. Rahel not only speaks in her own voice, she simultaneously speaks
for Estha too. Apart from the complexity that arises due to the interweaving of two distinct time frames the “distribution of selfhood” (Harishankar 52) into the brother-sister duo creates an intricacy on its own. Referring to Robert Rogers, Harishankar analyses the fragmentation of the narrator. Fragmentation or “Doubling” as per Rogers may be implicit or explicit. While in the case of the former we find a split self, in case of explicit doubling there is distribution of single selfhood into multiple characters. This distribution of selfhood again can be dual or multiple. Finally, the doubling may take place by multiplication or division. In case of multiplication, the characters tend to be identical and enforce the point of view, while in case of division the characters are opposite to each other. Harishankar concludes, “Through these two characters, the work presents explicit, dual fragmentation and doubling by division” (Harishankar 52).

This reading by Harishankar rightly defines the centrality of the Rahel-Estha relationship in the novel and the need to understand this relationship before going to analyse other relationships as depicted in this celebrated work of Arundhati Roy. The relationship between Ammu and Rahel is no ordinary mother-daughter relationship, since Rahel is no ordinary daughter. She encompasses the sense and sensibility of her brother as well, which is often complementary to her own sense and sensibility. What is fascinating is that the relationship between Rahel and Estha in a sense encompasses the Ammu-Estha relationship as well. Rahel thus trying to recreate her mother
becomes Ammu herself, a cyclical process so common with the mother-daughter relationships.

Ammu’s relationship with her daughter Rahel stands on a more secure footing compared to that between Ammu and her mother as discussed in Chapter 5. Being ostracised on all comers Ammu and her children have no option but to fall back upon each other for support and security. Their relationship is based on their vulnerability to the family and society. It is their role as the “worst transgressors” of the “laws that lay down who should be loved and how (and how much)” (Roy, God of Small Things 31) that probably shapes their relation. This violation of the social norms creates an intricate relation between them, unique in its own way.

Ammu’s love for her twin children is shaped by her concern for them. She realises rightly that she is the only one to care about them in this world. The two children are greatly vulnerable because of her status as a divorced woman which gives her “no position anywhere at all” (Roy, God of Small Things 45). Having lost her chances in life she wants to ensure that Rahel and Estha learn to know the hard facts of life early in their childhood. From this desire to protect her children comes the apparent bittemess in her attitude towards them.

Ammu loved her children (of course), but their wide-eyed vulnerability, and their willingness to love people who didn’t really love them, exasperated her and sometimes made her want to hurt them – just as an education, a protection.
It was as though the window through which their father disappeared had been kept open for anyone to walk in and be welcomed.

To Ammu her twins seemed like a pair of small bewildered frogs engrossed in each other's company, lolloping arm in arm down a highway full of hurtling traffic. Entirely oblivious of what trucks can do to frogs. Ammu watched over them fiercely. Her watchfulness stretched her, made her taut and tense. She was quick to reprimand her children, but even quicker to take offence on their behalf (Roy, *God of Small Things* 43).

Ammu's keenness not to be faulted on account of her children's behaviour finds expression in her severe attitude towards them when she is publicly disobeyed by her twin-children. She almost expresses a desire to make an exhibition of her children, to show how well behaved and good mannered they are. And when she fails in her endeavour she feels humiliated.

'If you ever,' Ammu said, 'and I mean this, EVER, ever again disobey me in Public, I will see to it that you are sent away to somewhere where you will jolly well learn to behave. Is that clear?'

When Ammu was really angry, she said Jolly Well. Jolly Well was a deeply well with larfing dead people in it.
Ammu makes it quite clear in her own sort of way how she loves the two of them and how they ought not to hurt her ever. This in a sense exhibits her dominance over the children; it shows how she wants to turn them into her puppets and make them follow her every lead, but it also brings out her vulnerability as well. Being susceptible to others all through her life she exercises the little control over her children not only to protect them but also to satisfy her ego. But more than obedience what she demands from Rahel and Estha is love. She is so desperate for their adoration that she is ready to hammer into them that they must return what she gives.

‘Everybody says that children need a Baba. And I say no. Not my children. D’you know why?’

Two heads nodded.

‘Why. Tell me,’ Ammu said.

And not together, but almost, Esthappen and Rahel said:

‘Because you’re our Ammu and our Baba and you love us Double.’

‘More than Double,’ Ammu said (Roy, God of Small Things 149).

It is not always that Ammu is able to make her children do what she pleases. There are moments when there is a misunderstanding between them as she cannot enter into the world of her children. This world is further made
inaccessible by the strange equation between her twin-children. At the Abhilash Talkies, the Orangedrink Lemondrink man, forces Estha to masturbate him. This comes as a shock to Estha, who unwittingly becomes a victim of sexual assault. It leaves a deep scar in him. But as he cannot narrate what has happened to him Ammu fails to realise his torment. Only Rahel has an understanding of what Estha has gone through. Looking at the man she immediately recoils from him. “As she approached him, he smiled at her and something about that portable piano smile, something about the steady gaze in which he held her, made her shrink from him. It was the most hideous thing she had ever seen” (Roy, *God of Small Things* 111). However, the man is extremely polite and gentle in his outward behaviour forcing Ammu to lavish some words of appreciation for him. For Rahel, who has shared her brother’s anguish this is too much to bear. Suddenly, the words, “So why don’t you marry him then?” (Roy, *God of Small Things* 112) slip out of her mouth.


‘Rahel,’ Ammu said. Rahel froze. She was desperately sorry for what she had said. She didn’t know where those words had come from. She didn’t know that she’d had them in her. But they were out now, and wouldn’t go back in. They hung about that red staircase like clerks in a Government office. Some stood, some sat and some shivered their legs (Roy, *God of Small Things* 112).
This episode obviously leaves a gasping wound in the mother-daughter relationship. Ammu is deeply anguished by what her daughter has to say. Apart from her pains because of her personal feelings she suffers the added ignominy of being publicly humiliated by her daughter. She warns Rahel that if she goes on hurting her she would love her less. Rahel not having wanted to say these words in the first place is threatened by her mother’s warning. For everything she has had to suffer in her small life doing without her mother’s love is something she can never bear.

A cold moth with unusually dense dorsal tufts landed lightly on Rahel’s heart. Where its icy legs touched her, she got goose bumps. Six goose bumps on her careless heart.

A little less her Ammu loved her (Roy, God of Small Things 112).

The relationship between Rahel and her mother is not always acrimonious. There are moments of deep love and understanding between them, which keep them going amidst the crises in their lives. More often than not these moments include Estha as well. They are moments that they all treasure, they show the children’s infinite care and concern for the mother. For example, seeing Ammu not yet awake from her dream world, Rahel and Estha make an effort to wake her up, not suddenly – as it may give her a heart attack – but gradually. So they go on discreetly disturbing her. Ammu’s joy knows no bound.
Ammu, resting under the skin of her dream, observed them and ached with her love for them (Roy, *God of Small Things* 218).

Again, the night Rahel returns from the airport it is her mother's goodnight kiss that tells her that Ammu is not really angry. She is delighted to have been forgiven, and as a gesture of appreciation has a special word for her mother.

_We be of one blood, ye and I_ (Roy, *God of Small Things* 329).

The same easy relationship is again found when Estha and Rahel bring back their mother from slumber and ponder over the stretch marks on their mother's belly. They make queries relating to their birth trying to keep Ammu interested in them. And at the sign of Ammu's drowsiness they change their line of thinking, showing their interest in what they did to their mother before they were born.

_That’s Estha’s kick, and that’s mine_,’ Rahel said. ‘...And that’s Estha’s and that’s mine.’

Between them they apportioned their mother’s seven silver stretchmarks. Then Rahel put her mouth on Ammu’s stomach and sucked at it, pulling the soft flesh into her mouth and drawing her head back to admire the shining oval of spit and the faint red imprint of her teeth on her mother’s skin.

Ammu wondered at the transparence of that kiss. It was a clear-as-glass kiss. Unclouded by passion or desire – that pair
of dogs that sleeps so soundly inside children, waiting for them to grow up. It was a kiss that demanded no kiss-back (Roy, *God of Small Things* 221).

The relationship between the mother and the children reach a primal animalistic level here. It is the sheer joy of birth that the twins wonder at and appreciate the effort of their mother for it. They share a close physical intimacy with their mother that is uncluttered by passion. It is a relationship not based on the daily diatribe of give and take. Hence Roy best describes the relationship by drawing a parallel to a dog and her puppies.

She shrugged her children off the way a bitch shrugs off her pups when she's had enough of them (Roy, *God of Small Things* 222).

It is however, not only in pleasure that the daughter is attached to her mother but also in the moments of pain as well. In fact, it is the moment of pains that outdo the moments of joy. Again, Rahel has her brother Estha as a co-sufferer in all these moments. Their life reaches the catastrophic point once they fear that they are millstones round their mother's neck. The vivid picture of millstones etched in their minds from their viewing of a Hollywood movie precipitates the matter to a disastrous end. Nevertheless, the tragedy had originated much before. It now turns out to be their turn to add to the calamity. It all begins with the discovery of Ammu's relationship with Velutha. Baby Kochamma in conjunction with Mammachi leads Ammu to her room and locks her there. Rahel and Estha wonder why their mother has been locked up. The
answer they receive is hardly what they are prepared for and creates a fear-psychosis in them.

‘Because of you!’ Ammu had screamed. ‘If it wasn’t for you I wouldn’t be here! None of this would have happened! I wouldn’t be here! I would have been free! I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born! You’re the millstones round my neck!’ (Roy, *God of Small Things* 253)

As a consequence of Ammu’s diatribe the children decide to shift from the Ayemenem household. They plan to move across the river and make the History House their temporary refuge. It is not a rejection of their mother altogether. Estha reveals his willingness to return home once Ammu expresses her sorrow.

‘What if Ammu finds us and begs us to come back?’

‘Then we will. But only if she begs.’

Estha-the-Compassionate (Roy, *God of Small Things* 292).

But disaster strikes in many ways. Sophie Mol, who follows Estha and Rahel to the other side of the river, dies midstream as the boat capsizes. In the History House the two children witness their dear friend Velutha being maimed and killed in a clinical attack by the police. Having lost their innocence for ever Estha and Rahel return to their Ammu, who rightly finds them friendless in the large world. She wants her two children to stay together forever; probably she has had a premonition of her days in this world being numbered.
‘Promise me you’ll always love each other,’ she’d say, as she drew her children to her.

‘Promise,’ Estha and Rahel would say. Not finding words with which to tell her that for them there was no ‘Each, no Other’ (Roy, *God of Small Things* 225).

However, in spite of their inseparable identity, Estha and Rahel are separated since Chacko orders Ammu to move away from the Ayemenem household and to remove one of the twins as well. It is decided that Estha is to be returned to Baba. On the railway platform Rahel asks when Ammu is going to bring Estha back. She replies it would be as soon as she gets a job. “But that will be never!” (Roy, *God of Small Things* 325) the words come out of Estha’s mouth, though he only wants to mean it cannot be soon. Ammu promises them of opening a new school. They are delighted at having a real teacher, real blackboards and proper punishments. Rahel’s desire for “proper punishment” (Roy, *God of Small Things* 326) shows what life has taught the little twins. It is disproportionate punishments that they have seen to rule life; Ammu, Velutha, Rahel and Estha themselves – all powerless people – have been victims of this menace. And it is this suffering that brings the mother and her two children together. Estha’s words turn to be prophetic. Never does the three meet again.

Rahel’s final meeting with her mother happens four years later. For her mother time seems to have stopped and she goes on believing her children to be the same seven years old, as they were when she left them. With her
meagre salary she buys Rahel gifts worthy of a seven year old. Throughout
her stay with her daughter she goes on saying about her future prospects in
an U.N. job never allowing Rahel to utter a word. She is afraid that her
daughter’s probing might see through her sham. She promises to bring back
Estha soon enough and present him his comics then. Rahel finds her mother
to have changed and hated her mother for it. Ammu dies soon in a cheap hotel.
She dies unattended haunted by a nightmare of being branded as a whore.
Her cremation is attended by Chacko and Rahel. The Church does not allow
her to be buried. She is taken to an electric crematorium. Rahel remembers
her brother at the moment. She remembers how he would have collected the
receipt of their mother’s cremation. Rahel is asked to write to her brother but
she cannot do the same.

Write what? My dear Estha, How are you? I am well. Ammu
died yesterday.

Rahel never wrote to him. There are things that you can’t
do – like writing letters to a part of yourself. To your feet or hair.

Or heart (Roy, God of Small Things 163-164).

Roy poignantly portrays the union of Ammu’s twin children at the moment of
her death. The relationship of the mother with her daughter is shaped by both
pleasant and unpleasant feelings. But ultimately they share a common bond, a
bond too deep to fathom. Again, the death of Ammu means the reliving of the
relationship between Rahel and Estha. It also means the resurrection of their
mother, who is to live through them. This theme is developed further when Rahel finally reunites with her brother after a gap of twenty-three years.

However, it is not only their status as victims, which unites Ammu and her twin-children. They are bonded by their love for a man, a love which is forbidden according to the love-laws. The man in question is Velutha, 'The God of Small Things' in Ammu's dreams – her lover, the best friend of her children. It is the children, especially Rahel, who is essentially responsible for the relationship between Ammu and Velutha. When Ammu sees her daughter playing with Velutha, outside the purview of the little family drama – 'Welcome Home, Our Sophie Mol', her heart aches in envy. She does not realise the nature of her jealousy but it presages a turning point in her life.

She was surprised at the extent of her daughter's physical ease with him. Surprised that her child seemed to have a sub-world that excluded her entirely. A tactile world of smiles and laughter that she, her mother, had no part in. Ammu recognized vaguely that her thoughts were shot with a delicate, purple tinge of envy. She didn't allow herself to consider whom it was that she envied. The man or her child. Or just their world of hooked fingers and sudden smiles (Roy, *God of Small Things* 176).

Nevertheless, the moment proves to be a defining point for many a life. For Ammu and her children as well as Velutha it marks the beginning of a cataclysmic journey that can end only in tragedy. Ammu's falling in love with
Velutha, the Paravan, is no ordinary affair; it marks the beginning of a voyage
forbidden in the recesses of history.

Centuries telescoped into one evanescent moment. History was
wrong-footed, caught off guard. Sloughed off like an old
snakeskin. Its marks, its scars, its wounds from old wars and the
walking backwards days all fell away. In its absence it left an
aura, a palpable shimmering that was as plain to see as the
water in a river or the sun in the sky. As plain to feel as the heat
on a hot day, or the tug of a fish on a taut line. So obvious that
no one noticed.

In that brief moment, Velutha looked up and saw things
that he hadn’t seen before. Things that had been out of bounds
so far, obscured by history’s blinkers.

Simple things.

For instance, he saw that Rahel’s mother was a woman.

...That she had gifts to give him too (Roy, *God of Small
Things* 176-177).

The relationship between Ammu and Velutha is doomed from the
beginning. A divorced woman from an intercommunity love marriage has no
respectability; but nevertheless, she has a family name to protect by leading a
life of austerity and humble submission. And when Ammu fails in that pursuit
tragedy is bound to follow. Velutha is implicated in a false case. Baby
Kochamma fuelled by her own hatred for Velutha conjures up charges of
murder, rape and abduction with the greatest flourish of imagination. Comrade Pillai too, from a greater loyalty to his caste than to his political ideology, desists from protecting a fellow party-worker. The ‘Touchable Police’ of Kottayam, bestowed with the noble duty of protecting the ‘Touchable Wombs’ carry out a professional job of clinically finishing off Velutha and ensuring that the wheels of history carry on as before.

Ironically, everyone, including those who love Velutha most, has a hand in his victimization and killing. Ammu, Rahel and Estha too cannot disown their responsibilities.

All three of them bonded by the certain, separate knowledge that they had loved a man to death (Roy, God of Small Things 324).

After Velutha is brutalized by the Police they put him into the lock up. The children are made to follow him to the police station. From their account the Kottayam Police realise that they have made a mistake and wrongly implicated a man who is not responsible in any way for the charges brought against him. Baby Kochamma, who is responsible for the charges, is threatened by Inspector Matthew; her false charges would mean serious trouble to her. She coaxes and terrorises the twins to agree to what she has theorised. They must implicate their beloved Velutha in the false charge that Baby Kochamma has framed. The implications otherwise would be enormous, she threatens.

‘The thing is,’ Baby Kochamma’s voice was saying, ‘what’s done is done. The Inspector says he’s going to die
anyway. So it won’t really matter to him what the police think.

What matters is whether you want to go to jail and make Ammu
go to jail because of you. It’s up to you to decide that’ (Roy, *God
of Small Things* 318).

It is hardly any choice at all. On the one hand they have to implicate one who
apart from their Ammu is the most beloved to them. They could not save
Velutha or voice their protest when the police battered the Paravan into pulp
before their eyes. Now, they are asked to betray their friend when he is in
distress, when he has been renounced by one and all. But the alternative is
too terrifying a prospect for the two children. It would amount to betrayal of
their mother, a prospect of life-long jail term and their Ammu, the loss of the
only support that they still have in their life. They make the choice for the living
than the dead, for the future than the past, for hope than despair. It is a choice
they have to regret all through their lives.

In the years to come they would replay this scene in their
heads. As children. As teenagers. As adults. Had they been
deceIVED INTO DOING WHAT THEY DID? HAD THEY BEEN TRICKED INTO
condemnation?

In a way, yes. But it wasn’t as simple as that. They both
knew that they had been given a choice. And how quick they
had been in the choosing! They hadn’t given it more than a
second of thought before they looked up and said (not together,
The guilt in them unites Rahel and Estha to their mother. Ammu goes to the Kottayam Police station, with a hope of clearing the name of Velutha from the crime. Inspector Matthew refuses to hear anything from her alleging her to be a whore. Ammu is powerless against the patriarchal force fed on by caste equations and powered by the forces of state, religion and political calculations. She can only sense her own guilt, her own responsibility in killing a man he loved:

‘He’s dead,’ Ammu whispered to him. ‘I’ve killed him’ (Roy, *God of Small Things* 8).

It is the same burden that Estha carries along. Of the twins he is chosen by Baby Kochamma to visit the lock up since she believes him to be pragmatic of the two. Little does she realise it is the same soul that Estha and Rahel bear, and whatever one of them does or think is actually an act done by both. Estha has to confirm the accusations against Velutha; all he has to do is to mumble a ‘Yes’ to what the policeman says. But he has to pay a heavy price for what he does. His innocence slips away from him and never in his life can he forget the matter.

But worst of all, he carried inside him the memory of a young man with an old man’s mouth. The memory of a swollen face and a smashed, upside-down smile. Of a spreading pool of clear liquid with a bare bulb reflected in it. Of a bloodshot eye
that had opened, wandered and then fixed its gaze on him.

Estha. And what had Estha done? He had looked into that beloved face and said: Yes.

Yes, it was him.

The word Estha’s octopus couldn’t get at: Yes. Hoovering didn’t seem to help. It was lodged there, deep inside some fold or furrow, like a mango hair between molars. That couldn’t be worried loose (Roy, God of Small Things 32).

Rahel too is responsible in her own way for bringing about the murder of Velutha. Not only because she is entwined to Estha’s thoughts and feelings and thus equally guilty of uttering the dreaded ‘Yes’, she is also accountable for raising Baby Kochamma’s ire against Velutha which greatly leads to the tragedy. Her discovery of Velutha in the march and her revelation of it to the family disclose his Communist leanings. He becomes a suspect from there on. Particularly, Baby Kochamma, who is humiliated by a section of the marchers, bears a personal grudge against him, which she exploits at the earliest opportunity. In fact, like Estha, Rahel too is guilty of identifying a man she ought not to have. However, there is a qualitative difference between the two identifications. It marks the passage of the twins from ‘Innocence’ to ‘Experience’. Rahel’s identification of Velutha is an act of innocence. It is a child’s sheer delight at having identified a man she loves when she does not expect him to be there. Her joy is particularly multiplied by Velutha’s carrying of a flag. She does not have the adult world complexity to understand what
that might mean. As it is a cry of innocence it is hard for all to keep Rahel quiet. Estha’s identification is on the other hand a sheer act of desperation, of being compelled to do what would sound the death of his childhood. It is a false act. He wrongly accuses Velutha of doing what he has not done, of what he could never have done. It is an act of betrayal of a personal friend. Naturally, it is hushed up, a mumbled ‘Yes’ in the lock-up is what he has to offer.

In the first place the children do not understand the role of their mother in all that has happened.

It took the twins years to understand Ammu’s part in what had happened. At Sophie Mol’s funeral and in the days before Estha was Returned, they saw her swollen eyes, and with the self-centredness of children, held themselves wholly culpable for her grief (Roy, God of Small Things 324).

But once they understand her role, Rahel and Estha have to reunite with their mother, to reaffirm her presence; and what better way to do that than to break the love-laws that Ammu had once broken.

When Rahel returns from America to meet her brother Estha, who has been re-returned by their father, the similarities between her and Ammu are obvious. She has reached the age of thirty-one, an age in which her mother died. She has also been married and like her mother her marriage too has been a failure. A divorced woman from an inter-community love marriage Rahel returns to the Ayemenem family, unwelcome by Baby Kochamma, the only survivor from the past. She is only summoned to take care of and finally
cart off her somewhat eccentric brother, who has stopped speaking altogether.
She too is a burden to the household like her mother once was.

Rahel's intimacy with Estha is fuelled by a discovery that was so
obvious and yet remained hidden for the entire life. The same is true in case of
Ammu-Velutha relationship. Ammu and Velutha know each other for a life time.
They grow up together. Though separated by the curse of untouchability, the
two are not totally strangers to each other. Ammu as a little girl, received small
gifts from Velutha, artefacts made by the Paravan himself. But after her return
from her husband, on a fateful day, a gaze transforms the relation between the
two. The forces of history are relegated to secondary places as biology takes
over. The two of them discover each other to be man and woman (Roy, God of
Small Things 176-177). Ammu and Velutha dare to break the love-laws. Again,
biology asserts itself as Rahel discovers her twin-brother in a different light.
Once more, a gaze transforms the course of the relationship.

Rahel searched her brother's nakedness for signs of herself. In
the shape of his knees. The arch of his instep. The slope of his
shoulders. The angle at which the rest of his arm met his elbow.
The way his toe-nails tipped upwards at the ends. The sculpted
hollows on either side of his taut, beautiful buns. Tight plums.
Men's bums never grow up. Like school satchels, they evoke in
an instant memories of childhood. Two vaccination marks on his
arm gleamed like coins. Hers were on her thigh.
Girls always have them on their thighs, Ammu used to say.

Rahel watched Estha with the curiosity of a mother watching her wet child. A sister a brother. A woman a man. A twin a twin.

She flew these several kites at once.

He was a naked stranger met in a chance encounter. He was the one that she had known before Life began. The one who had once led her (swimming) through their lovely mother's cunt.

Both things unbearable in their polarity. In their irreconcilable far-apartness (Roy, *God of Small Things* 92-93).

It is the various aspects of the relationship that strikes one most. Entwined in mind, physically separated at birth, the twins are forced apart from each other. Their physical union is in a sense a rebellion against this forced detachment. But their union is not merely a union of the bodies. Their union is also marked by the sharing of the same haunting memory from which they can hardly escape. The actual copulation between Estha and Rahel is preceded by their viewing of the *kathakali* dance, and the maddening frenzy of the dancers.

There was madness there that morning. Under the rose bowl. It was no performance. Esthappen and Rahel recognized it. They had seen its work before. Another morning. Another
stage. Another kind of frenzy (with millipedes on the soles of its shoes). The brutal extravagance of this matched by the savage economy of that.

They sat there, Quietness and Emptiness, frozen two-egg fossils, with hornbumps that hadn't grown into horns. Separated by the breadth of a kuthambalam. Trapped in the bog of a story that was and wasn't theirs. That had set out with the semblance of structure and order, then bolted like a frightened horse into anarchy (Roy, *God of Small Things* 235-236).

The mad frenzy that Rahel and Esthappen had watched as children sent their life into a crazy whirlpool; unable to stop the violence they had accused themselves of being the perpetrators of the same violence, of setting everything into motion. The guilt has pervaded all their lives and added a tinge to their consciousness. Now face to face with the same fury, their life reaches another crossroad as they make a passionate outburst. This is almost a cathartic response to escape the frenzy, to protect them from the mindless violence that envelops their lives and over which they enjoy no control. It is because they can make no sense of this rage in the outside world that Rahel and Estha seek a world of their own. In this regard, they are akin to Ammu and Velutha, who too cannot cope with the vagaries of the external world and seek redress by coming together in search of solace.

As Velutha was once fascinated by Ammu's beauty, Estha too remains enchanted by Rahel. But to Velutha, Ammu was only a woman, apparently
dangerous because of her family background, yet too desirable to be avoided.

Estha on the other hand, not only sees a woman in Rahel, he also witnesses his twin-sister – a part of himself and more importantly his mother, Ammu.

Rahel thus takes the role of her mother and helps to satisfy the Oedipus complex in Estha. It is noteworthy that Estha was once forced out of her mother's company when he was returned to his Baba. His union with Rahel stands out on a symbolic level to be a reunification with his mother. Naturally, Estha's visualization of his sister is in terms of Ammu.

She was lovely to him. Her hair. Her cheeks. Her small, clever-looking hands.

His sister.

A nagging sound started up in his head. The sound of passing trains. The light and shade and light and shade that falls on you if you have a window seat.

He sat even straighter. Still, he could see her. Grown into their mother's skin. The liquid glint of her eyes in the dark. Her small straight nose. Her mouth, full lipped. Something wounded-looking about it. As though it was flinching from something. As though long ago someone – a man with rings – had hit her across it. A beautiful, hurt mouth.

Their beautiful mother's mouth, Estha thought. Ammu's mouth.
That had kissed his hand through the barred train window.

First class, on the Madras Mail to Madras.


The last time he had seen her (Roy, God of Small Things 299-300).

Estha’s first observation of Rahel after they once again return to Ayemenem reminds him of his last moments there with his mother, Ammu.

This may have to do something with the setting of the two scenes. It is the same room in which Ammu had packed Estha’s belongings in a little trunk.

Again, it is here that Rahel returns, rediscovers his brother, makes love to him.

This visibly goes on to show the mantle with which Rahel is now on-stage, no matter what might happen she has to take on the role of her Ammu.

The room to which, years later, Rahel would return and watch a silent stranger bathe. And wash his clothes with crumbling bright blue soap.

Flatmuscled, and honey coloured. Sea-secrets in his eyes. A silver raindrop on his ear.

Esthapappychachen Kuttappen Peter Mon (Roy, God of Small Things 227)

It is the uttering of the same words that goes on to establish the relationship between Rahel and Estha once again. Rahel approaches her brother; it is an advance which Estha cannot resist. But it is notable that even
when they are involved in sexual consummation, Rahel takes the part of her mother.

She moves her mouth.

Their beautiful mother's mouth (Roy, *God of Small Things* 327)

And what they carry out is also a repetition of what happened in the past, of history being reiterated.

Only that once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much (Roy, *God of Small Things* 328).

It is a parallel to the events in the lives of Ammu and Velutha. Ammu and Velutha, two outcasts of the society seek refuge in each other. Their coming together is as much influenced by their physical needs as by their necessity of being able to cope with the societal hassle that they regularly face. They find in each other the safe haven, a harbour where they can unburden their feelings. But it is not with great hope that they approach each other. They have only little hopes to share; the only immediate wish of being able to meet each other once again the next day, of being able to lose oneself in the arms of the other. So every day they part with a word of hope, a small promise, ‘*Naaley*, Tomorrow. But they are unable to keep their appointment. The brute social forces obliterate their love as they dared to defy the common norm. They fail in what they dared to achieve. But now after twenty three years it is their loved ones, who once again appears in their role to enact the same
drama. Where Ammu and Velutha fail, Rahel and Estha succeed. They carry on with the tradition of breaking the Love Laws, of rewriting the pages of history. If one looks at the physical relationship between Ammu and Velutha not simply as a sexual gratification of two individuals belonging to two different castes not allowed to mix freely but as a statement of protest against the social custom that encourages untouchability, Rahel's and Estha's relationship may be interpreted as an assertion of the very voices of protest once again.

This voice of protest, which places greater value on the individual's wishes and fancies than the mere reiteration of social norms had once been subdued, but they can now be heard once again. Rahel thus establishes an ultimate accord with her mother by echoing the same values for which Ammu was once crucified.

The daughter's endeavour to recreate her mother brings in a new dimension in the mother daughter relationship. The daughter is often motivated to look back into the past, to express her reverence to her mother without whom she could hardly have carried on. In most cases it is the writer daughter who looks at those unfortunate literary mothers whose voices have been strangled for ever. The other type of relationship that compels one to redraw her mother is the traumatic one where the daughter somehow holds herself guilty for her mother's ill fate and the process of recreation becomes a means of therapeutic escape.
Notes:

1. Generally the relationship between a daughter in law and her mother in law is not very amiable. It is noteworthy that Urmi develops a deep bond with her mother in law, Mira. This becomes possible probably because Mira is already dead when Urmi gets married.

2. There was a practice in some conservative Indian families to rename the daughter in law and thus obliterate her maiden identity altogether.

3. It is worth noting that the relationship between Urmi and Mira is free from the formers relationship with Kishore, her husband. This brings out the possibility of communication between daughter figures and mother figures even when they are not directly connected to each other.

4. Biographical writing that is too full of praise for its subject.