Chapter 8

Re-creating the mother:

"I write so you are"
Re-creating the Mother: ‘I write so you are’

The resurrection of the mother or mother figure by a daughter or daughter figure has been one of the important trends of feminist writing. In the previous chapter we have discussed about daughters who try to recreate their mothers either as an act of tribute or for therapeutic escape from some pent up guilt-feeling. But this restoration of the mother figures by the daughters involves a close bond between the two. The remembrances thus become fond memories, which allow the daughter to establish a relationship with the mother once she is no more. However, there is an opposite dimension to this process of recreation of the mother as well. Daughters often remember their mothers as hostile figures with whom they had to continuously fight for the constricted space that society allowed them. Under such a circumstance the mother becomes more of a competitor than a fellow sufferer. Afterwards the daughter recreates her mother often as an effort to escape from her. She takes liberty in imaginatively reconstructing her mother, thereby altering the power dynamics in the relationship. Her ability to mould her mother, create her mother, shape her mother at the imaginative plane gives the daughter a sense of security which she probably never enjoyed all through her real life alongside her mother. The present chapter explores this reversal of the power balance as evinced in two of the fin de siècle novels by Indian Women Writers.
Section I: *Difficult Daughters*

Virmati – Ida:

In our earlier discussion of the novel *Difficult Daughters* in Chapter 5, we have seen how Virmati proved to be a difficult daughter for her mother Kasturi. However, she is not the only ‘difficult daughter’ in the novel; her daughter Ida turns out to be no less problematic. The novel begins with the description of the death of Virmati. Her death, though mourned, leads to something positive too. The narrator, Virmati’s daughter, can speak only because her mother is no more, only because she is now mentally unshackled.

Now her shadow no longer threatens me. Without the hindrance of her presence, I can sink into her past and make it mine (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 258).

What is paradoxical is that even Virmati, the rebel, cannot be an ideal mother. The generational dialectics must spell the doom for everything old and rusty. As Virmati grows up, rebelling against Kasturi, Ida too must grow up rebelling against Virmati. So she also turns out to be a ‘difficult daughter’ like her mother. In fact, she refuses to be what her mother stands for. The very first sentence of the novel reflects her attempt to reject her mother.

The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 1).

But in trying not to be like her mother, in trying to portray herself as the very negative of her mother, Ida nevertheless confirms the centrality of Virmati, from which she can have no escape. It brings out Virmati’s positive stature in
the novel. To her relatives Virmati the nonconformist, the outlaw, the castaway must stand outside the circle. But for her daughter, Virmati must be the very centre, she must be the standard by which everyone and everything should be judged. Ida not only questions the centre/periphery, positive/negative dualism but reconstructs the story of her mother’s life itself by allowing her imagination to flow:

In searching for a woman I could know, I have pieced together material from memories that were muddled, partial and contradictory. The places I visited, the stuff I read tantalized me with fragments that I knew I would not be able fully to reconstruct. Instead, I imagined histories, rejecting the material that didn’t fit, moulding ruthlessly the material that did. All through, I felt the excitement of discovery, the pleasure of fitting narratives into a discernible inheritance (Kapur, Difficult Daughters 258).

Ida thus becomes as much the creator of Virmati, as the latter is of Ida. But her creation is of a different sort. She transgresses ‘biology’ to create with her mind, her intellect. She rejects her traditional association with ‘nature’ as a woman and embraces the world of ‘culture’.

Ida has to recreate Virmati for she herself feels vulnerable. The domination by her mother always instigated her to search for escape routes. In order to survive Ida too must strive for centrality and therefore, assumes the role of the omnipotent creator. In her imaginative reconstruction, she frees her
mother from the bounds of periphery and in doing so asserts her own centrality as a creator of a central figure. By becoming Virmati's creator, Ida frees herself from the dominance of her mother. The 'marginal' now becomes the 'central' figure, nay the creator of 'centrality' itself. Ida is thus bound to her mother as well as free from her; she is bound, as the story she weaves must connect her to Virmati, while at the same time her superior position as a creator sets her free.

This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be. Do not haunt me any more [Emphasis added] (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 258-59).

The daughter can escape the mother's engulfment by recreating her mother. As Alice Walker contends in her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens", we may also conclude that Ida too, like Alice Walker, owes a lot of her creativity to her mother. Virmati may not have penned her own words, but she certainly did have them in her secret chamber. "Our mothers and grandmothers, some of them moving to music not yet written. And they waited" (Walker 178). They waited to let the daughters sing for them. In doing so, the daughter simultaneously rebels and recreates — an act that leads to a better and mature understanding between the mother and the daughter.

The act of rebelling against and thereby recreating the mother figure which is only glossed over in *Difficult Daughters*, in the form of the relationship...
between Ida and Virmati, finds a much more detailed expression in Gittha
Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*.

**Section II: When Dreams Travel**

*Shahrzad – Dunyazad – Dilshad:*

*When Dreams Travel* (1999) opens in the traditional theatrical pattern
as the curtain is raised to unveil events of the past – the stories of the *Arabian
Nights* and the liberation of the city and its ruler in the hands of the illustrious
storyteller, Shahrzad. But it is not the ghost of the celebrated Oriental classic
that haunts Gittha Hariharan's fiction. Even if the remnants are connected to
the *Arabian Nights*, they are rendered with a typical modern interpretation.

Gittha Hariharan, as we see, is not so much interested in what happened at the
centre-stage, but rather at what happened beyond the limits of the stage. The
late twentieth century rendering of the medieval classic begins at a point
where its more illustrious predecessor seems to have ended.

Apparently the novel does not fit into the scheme of study of the
mother-daughter relationship, there are no mother figures whatsoever and the
scanty references to the mothers, rather to their absences, are too few to
justify a critical study. What is fascinating, however, is that the novel can be
interpreted as a quest for the literary mother, as Dunyazad's search for her
elder sister and her taking on the mantle of the story-teller seem to suggest.
Moreover, it is a fiction which celebrates the power of imagination over brute
force, the power of the 'mirror' over that of the 'sword', the power of the naked,
frail body over the heavily armoured one. Thus it is a celebration of all
to womanhood and a search and tribute to all the mothers who dared to defy the
patriarchal norm in their unique ways. Again *When Dreams Travel* itself may
be regarded as a daughter in quest of mother, the celebrated *Arabian Nights*,
a work set within the strict patriarchal tradition and in all likelihood the creation
of male writers and yet suggesting the power of the feminine over the male
hegemony.

*When Dreams Travel* is set against a different background than the
*Arabian Nights*. The bloody backdrop which marks the setting of the thousand
and one nights of struggle of the vulnerable against the might of the gory ruler
is successfully negotiated. The naked neck has marked its triumph over the
naked sword. The redemption of the ruler and the salvation of the city of
Shahabad are achieved. A new beginning is on the anvil. “The story ends on­
stage. Off-stage it has just begun” (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 16). So
long it is the elder sister Shahrzad, who is the chief narrator. It is her narrative
performance which saves the two sisters for the thousand and one days
(rather the nights). Now she is no more. The ancient bed-chamber lies buried
in the dungeons of the palace. The baton is passed on, the mantle is
exchanged. Dunyazad who has been so long in the periphery must now
occupy the centre-stage. It is the younger sister’s performance which is going
to count from this point onwards. And while taking up the role of the story-teller,
of the martyr, the “silent sister” (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 16) cannot
ignore the past. It is the bygone days that hold the key to the future. Her quest
thus takes the form of a search for her elder sister, a biological sister who
nevertheless is a cultural predecessor, a literary mother in her own right.

When the moment of redemption is achieved, no amount of coaxing
and persuasion by the sultan is able to move Shahrzad into another bout of
story-telling. The dreams she had to weave night after night to earn her way
into martyrdom were all garnished with fear. Free from this nightmare she falls
silent.

The time for storytelling is past... Shahrzad moves slowly, an
odd mixture of grandeur and clumsiness, as if her feet have
suddenly grown heavy. As if now that her arduous travels are
over, she will be weighed down with her good works, her
wandering feet firmly bound to the palace, to partake of its
eternal delights (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 20-21).

For the world, Shahrzad is just at her glorious best; but for her sister, she is
dead. The redemption of the sultan means the death of the literary mother.
With no unsheathed sword threatening her vulnerable neck, Shahrzad fails
miserably. Though this remains unobserved to others it is blatantly exposed
before the eyes of the literary inheritor who vows to follow the same footsteps.
The mother having earned the laurels for her efforts is full of 'grandeur' at the
moment, but she appears 'clumsy' nonetheless. It is born out of the ardour she
has been exposed to. Her flights and travels into the fantasies come to an end
which signify that her freedom has actually confined her forever. As her world
vision gets narrowed down her position at the centre is now threatened. She
must yield her place to her literary successor who has so long been dumped to
the footnotes of history and mythology.

The rightful transition is marked in several forms. The first is the
marriage of Dunyazad, a culmination and prize of her long wait by the side of
the lustful-bed. She can now enjoy the rewards of a conjugal life, of giving
away her virginity without compromising with her chastity. But the nightly ritual
is not the only thing that the young sister inherits from her sister; she inherits
the dream-world of Shahrzad as well. She realises that unless she advances
on her own there would be another long wait for her, quite similar to her almost
eternal nightly vigils. "There is no end to her waiting, she sees, unless she lifts
those pretty, useless feet and steps forward. Dunyazad, never far behind,
seeks Shahrzad's new haunting grounds" (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*
23).

The recourse she takes is that of travelling. These movements do not
require the perilous journeys which one associates with travel. They only
require the flights into the world of dreams and fantasies, an occupation which
she has learned while remaining in close quarters with her sister. This is a
journey that Dunyazad has learnt to undertake from her elder sister, a journey
that is a remnant of their younger days when they could travel far and wide at
a moment's notice. The only baggage they carried with them was their wild
imagination, their only protection against the ever threatening sword. Now
Dunyazad is on a more dangerous mission - "Not just because she is alone till
she finds Shahrzad or her ghost, but because all impending journeys are
curiously subterranean” (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 24). She is to travel to the ancient bed-chamber, a dingy dungeon, a journey within from where none has emerged unscathed. This journey in quest of the literary mother thus becomes a journey within one’s own self, a journey to discover what she is.

The pattern of this expedition closely resembles that of a daughter following her mother’s footsteps. The daughter wants some space for herself, yet she finds that it is the well traversed path of her mother that she must pursue. It is a tradition that continues through generations. The mother gives way to the daughter. The latter in turn herself turns into a mother only to side step for the sake of her daughter. And the cycle goes on.

On these travels, Dunyazad follows, with the wisdom of hindsight, the many routes a virgin can take to martyrdom. She learns what it is to be Shahrzad’s descendant; to be Shahrzad’s sister, her trusted maid and accomplice, her most passionate lover. And Shahrzad too is travelling again in uncharted territories, the kind she likes best. Though she remains invisible to the naked eye, she can be stalked; Dunyazad, that loving spy, walks in her footsteps. At the tail end of this caravan of a thousand and one camels is a third woman, the youngest of the trio. This woman, as yet unknown to the royal sisters, has the strange notion that she is the natural companion, or descendant of Dunyazad. She follows far behind, a sunstruck traveller in an alien desert. Like her illustrious forebears, she is given to
dreaming; fabricating concoctions of travellers, virgins, martyrs. The powerless must have a dream or two, dreams that break walls, dreams that go through walls as if they are powerless (Hariharan, When Dreams Travel 24-25).

This is very much like the cyclical pattern of the mother-daughter relationship. Dunyazad follows the footsteps of her elder sister, and is herself in turn followed by the slave girl, Dilshad. The choice of Dunyazad’s descendant is significant; she represents the marginal sections of the society, one who is most oppressed among the subjugated gender. This choice gives universality to the theme of a literary heredity, any woman with the power of imagination and a bent of creativity can be the successor to the primal mother. The celebration of the dream world of the ‘powerless’, of the dreams which can break barriers, thus becomes a tribute to all the literary mothers of the past.

The primal literary mother, here taking the form of Shahrzad, is reinterpreted in various ways. “But there are other names that attach themselves to this story woman” (Hariharan, When Dreams Travel 25). Shahrzad, reconstructed and reconstructed in diverse forms, survives the multitudinous dimensions her character is associated with. Her image undergoes a transformation according to the land she travels into; she assumes several forms at an array of countries and places. But this simultaneously makes her a universal character, making her the representative of all literary mothers. Her story, rather the quest for her story
thus assumes a greater dimension as it becomes the search for all the ancient
mother-figures, who supported creativity.

But Shahrzad, like her own story, is a survivor. The
travelling tale undergoes a change of costume, language and
setting at each serai on its way. It adapts itself to local
conditions, to this country or that, a permanent fugitive from its
officious parent, legitimate history. And Shahrzad – she too has
learnt the lessons of the tales she told. She is now a myth that
must be sought in many places, fleshed in different bodies,
before her dreams let go of Dunyazad or her descendants
(Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 25).

Shahrzad’s transformation into a myth in the hands of posterity is
parallel to Alice Walker attributing the mantle of literary motherhood to all the
black women who dared to pursue the creative process in spite of all the
subjugation that they had to undergo. Walker makes it clear that it is not at all
important to look at what these literary mothers sang; what is of consequence
is that they dared to sing at all. The same attribute is applicable to Shahrzad
as well. Where others failed, she succeeded. In an age of humble submission
before the phallus and the sword she dared to defy the norms. Symbolically,
the phallus has always been attached to creativity and in particular male
creativity in the Western discourse. Shahrzad’s fight against the brute physical
force of her ruler-husband is thus not only a fight against the power of the
sword but also against the patriarchal discourse of creativity as well. Her
stories might have been rediscovered, reinterpreted, renarrated by her two
followers – Dunyazad and Dilshad. But what sets her apart is her courage to
confront the custom. The challenge for posterity is thus to find out the literary
mother “who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the
only medium her position in the society allowed her to use” (Walker 182). This
has been the case with numerous of anonymous women who have left their
“creative spark(s)” (Walker 182) to their daughters, never being able to bloom
the flower which the seeds within had promised. So the songs the
contemporary woman composes, the stories today’s woman writes are
actually songs and stories of yesteryears, of their mothers and grandmothers.
Not only is the content similar to the ones narrated by the earlier women, the
manner is also greatly influenced by them. In this connection the journey of
Dunyazad and Dilshad becomes the journey in quest of the primal literary
mother – in search of a female tradition that would enable them to feel secure
in a patriarchal cultural setting.

The vision of the eternal literary mother has much to do with the
positioning of women in general to the world of dream, visions and fantasies.
This is particularly true in case of Dunyazad who is considered to be the
successor of Shahrzad. She is represented as one belonging to the fictional
world where the impossible becomes possible, where the illogical is a greater
possibility than the logical. After her arduous journey to Shahabad in search of
her dead sister, the moment Dunyazad casts off her male attire she is
supposed to shift to a different world: “she has slipped into a world where
speculation is the mother tongue. Where story and myth and legend pinion her body with their overturned bowls of flesh" (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 35). Dunyazad’s portrayal at the moment as ‘a brand new mother’ (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 36) also bounds her physically to this illusory world of reverie. This at once marks her as a follower of Shahrzad, simultaneously promising that she too would be a literary mother with ‘wards’ of her own.

The change in role of Dunyazad from “the audience, the prompter, the chorus, the heckler” (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 37) to that of the primary speaker is not just a smooth transition of a mother’s mantle to her daughter. The event has greater connotations than what it seems at the first sight. The purpose of Dunyazad’s visit takes the form of a search for her literary mother. Moreover, it signifies a possible combat with the old enemy, the king Shahryar, on his own turf. It is a challenge that the younger sister takes up in search of her pioneering sister. And she is still unsure of what is in store for her; whether the consort of her sister is her vanquisher as well. “She is back though the battle is over. She is back, perhaps, because the battle is not over” (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 37). Her encounter with Shahryar thus takes the form of a challenge. She confronts the king with the question of how her sister died, a query she had put forward before the old nursemaid Sabiha. The answers she receives on both ends are cryptic innuendos, suggesting possible palace intrigues. The search is therefore, initially more of an exploration for the famous narrator than a probing into the nuances of her skills. Having reached Shahabad Dunyazad makes an effort to find her sister.
The travel through the memory lane takes a meandering path. In her quest for her missing sister Dunyazad traverses the sleepy highways, the corridors through the world of dream. In her dreams she travels through the palace dungeons. As she goes down the steps the fine marble gives way to coarse granite. As she goes down into a tunnel lined with interminable steps she finds a black throne laden with ruby-tinged words.

Leave your heart in its care, O traveller!
For down these passages
lurks that old spellbinder,
the fiend of the flowing waters. (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 46)

The almost dispassionate call to give away her heart terrifies her for a moment. She hesitates for a brief moment or two; “but it is now too late for doubt or safety” (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 48). Her search finally ends in a marble tomb, a small rectangular island floating in the midst of a “chamber of flowing waters” (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 48), an effect created by the subtle rhythmic movements shaped by the arrangement of gem stones. But the tablet on the tomb with an inscription has a new message to deliver and it is a terrifying one. It denies her existence altogether. Dunyazad, the compatriot of the great martyr, the fellow sufferer and intriguer finds that her name has totally been annulled from the pages of history. The tomb mentions the name of all those associated with Shahrzad, but obliterates the very being of Dunyazad.
Dunyazad crawls on the tomb till she reaches the tablet. She reads the words: ‘Here lies Shahrzad, Beloved Consort of Sultan Shahryar, Daughter of the Chief Wazir to the Sultan of Shahabad, Mother of Prince Umar and the departed Prince Jaffar.’ Dunyazad sees her grief, a menacing wave swelling and rising. It will crash down on her any minute now, but like an imbecile she is feverishly searching the tablet for her own name. She searches not only with her eyes, but with her fingers, which trace the letters as a groping, blind person would. At the very instant she realizes the search is futile, that there is not even an incomplete phrase beginning ‘Shahrzad, sister of,’ she sees the wave come down on her. She hears herself scream as she rises to meet it (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 48-49).

The loss of identity on part of Dunyazad comes as a great blow to her. So long she was content to be regarded as an associate of her more celebrated sister. Now she must find a space of her own.

Her reminiscences of her girlhood days recalling her practice of the Martyr’s Walk along with Shahrzad, demonstrate her position as an equal and her hunger for an independent identity. Dunyazad dreams of a death as a martyr just as her sister does. The death is a spectacle, in front of the crowd as she floats towards her hunter. She feels herself to be transparent as if everyone can see through her face and figure straight into her heart. “They look and they know I will die for my dreams” (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*
Shahrzad too has a vision of her own. She finds herself standing naked in front of her executioner and progressing towards him in measured steps. She appears vulnerable but challenges her assassin in his "glinting armour of metal" with her "angry skin" (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 54). She places herself as an offering, a sacrifice for the general good. "The sun is in his eyes but he can see through the glare a little hoard of sparkling red jewels. Her daring, her tenacity, her love of power and danger, and most of all, her greed for life" (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 54). The two sisters thus share the same thoughts, feelings, attitudes to life. Their stories however differ. Dunyazad is passionate about her role as a martyr preferring her end in front of eager spectators; Shahrzad views it as a more private affair. She is equally passionate about martyrdom but ready to expose herself only to her "lover and tormentor" (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 54). Moreover, she has a greater zeal for life; she is ready to sacrifice heroics if it can save her head. The attitude of Dunyazad is explicable. Being the younger of the two the footlight has always missed her. Even the wazir depends upon his elder daughter to save the kingdom and attain salvation for its ruler. Naturally, Dunyazad is not ready to miss any opportunity of coming under the spotlight. Even though the two sisters have so much in common, they have a rivalry between them too. This again shows how much the relationship is akin to one between mothers and daughters, who are though loving and adoring each other, have a fair bit of rivalry between them as well.
The physical affinity between the two sisters brings into focus another facet of their troublesome relationship. The two are akin to each other, one almost mirroring the other. Psychologically this puts them in a situation where they are like a mother and a daughter. Shahrzad continues to live in her sister.

'In the dying light, in the imperfect watery mirror from the past, she sees that she was right to crawl down to the dungeon. Here there is no pretence that Shahrzad is dead. Dunyazad sees the trembling face in the mirror, her sister's deathless face'

(Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 68).

The resemblance between the two is almost parallel to that of the semblance between the mother and the daughter as described by Irigaray.

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).

But Irigaray also raises the anxiety-problem as a result of such resemblance. Appearing like another may mean the end of one's self. To lose one's identity can be tormenting.

Between the two, what are you? What space is yours alone? In what frame must you contain yourself? And how to let your face show through, beyond all masks? (Irigaray, “And the One Doesn’t Stir without the Other” 63)

The fear of annihilation of the self as a consequence of the similarity between the two is very much a part of any mother-daughter relationship. This is
evident in Dunyazad’s relationship with her elder sister as well. Dunyazad is truly in the quest of her own space and many a time we find her trying to transgress into the path of her sister as she endeavours to occupy the centre-stage. This marks the ambivalent nature of the relationship as is usual in case of a mother and a daughter. Dunyazad like any daughter resents the mother-figure because of the fear of losing her identity and yet must follow her predecessor’s path to occupy the same position that the latter possessed.

The fact that the relationship between the two sisters is much like that of a mother-daughter relationship becomes quite obvious from the position of Shahryar in their relationship. Every time Dunyazad remembers her sister it is in association with the Sultan. The royal couple get twined in the consciousness of the young bystander at the regal bedchamber. Dunyazad remembers the two in their physical intimacy and the sexual desire they aroused in her virgin body. That Dunyazad herself was somewhat attracted to the ruler of Shahbad is evident. The moment she meets him after the long span of time when both of them have lost their consorts she realizes that “(t)here will always be an ancient bedchamber between them, a bridal night that never was” (Hariharan, When Dreams Travel 58). The reference to this bridal night again comes in the form of two stories narrated by Dunyazad. In the first one she is to take the place of Shahrzad, when the latter is exhausted by the toils of delivery. But the chance is missed by her when at the final moment the storyteller decides to take her usual place. In the final story the younger sister manages to share the royal bed as Shahrzad is no more. "Now
Dunyazad is waiting for the night, her night, to come to her, reveal its insatiable appetite for unfamiliar skin” (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 260). But there is an obvious guilt feeling associated with it and the act is to be consummated in total darkness. But finally they must fail. The sultan fails to understand whether the shape changing lady in his bed is a figment of his imagination or is he simply bait in “Shahrzad’s oceanic imagination” (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 260). Dunyazad fails to play the role assigned to her. She can be no Shahrzad; as the moment of crisis approaches she cannot save the day, she cannot build a story of her own. This momentous failure may have something to do with her sense of suppressed guilt and her problem in playing the role of her literary mother with a man who was the latter’s husband. Cixous proclaims that “women must write through their bodies” (Cixous 886) that they must write with their mother’s milk (Cixous 881). This suggests that the feminine literary process must take into account the feminine thought process and her sexual attitudes. The failure on part of Dunyazad to achieve a union with her primal love object thus ensures the failure of her creativity [the only comforts she shares with Shahryar are in the “gifts of tongue, gentle tears and fraternal caresses”; there is no sexual consummation between the two: “The faint stirring between his thighs grow limp” (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 261)].

The development of female sexuality is not straightforward. “Psychoanalytic research discovered at the very outset that the development of the infantile libido to the normal heterosexual object-choice is in women
rendered difficult by certain peculiar circumstances" (Deutsch 165). As an infant the girl child develops its primary relationship first with its mother which is then transformed to her father and latter to other men. Initially, the mother is the primary love object for the girls. Their relationship with their fathers develops only as a consequence to their relationship with their mothers. This new relationship competes with the pre-oedipal tie that a daughter experiences with her mother. A primary love-relationship is established with the father as well, but the mother is not rejected. The initial relationship with the mother is retained and a new relationship is developed with the father. Whereas the daughter primarily depends on the mother for her emotional support, her sexual orientation is shaped by her relationship with her father.

Her attraction for the sultan from the days of yore may be interpreted as a daughter's love for her father. She is sexually attracted to her father but there is no proper social channel through which she can vent it. The fact that Dunyazad thinks of Shahrzad connecting her with Shahryar shows that the three form a trio of father, mother and daughter.

The cycle of nature ensures that the daughter who simultaneously loves and adores her mother herself turns into a mother and the same pattern of love-hate relationship continues. This is true in the case of *When Dreams Travel* as well. The novel explores the relationship between the two sisters on the first instant. But as Dunyazad outgrows her junior status she also finds a follower of her own, a slave girl named Dilshad. The hierarchy which is so obvious in the relationship between Shahrzad and Dunyazad is absent here. If
there is any inequity it is heavily tilted in favour of the slave-girl. In her delirium
Dunyazad hears the call of Shahrzad, the saviour of the virgins.

Shahrzad is there, Wise Shahrzad, talking as always,
ringed by a host of ghostly virgin brides. Shahrzad looks into the
distance, sees her. A smile of delighted surprise fills her face
and she holds out her arms to her Dunyazad. Though Shahrzad
is surrounded, used as she is to leading, she will want an
accomplice on equal ground. And she is lonely, having been
alone, so alone, since she made the terrible mistake of dying.

All Dunyazad has to do is cross the waters that separate
them. She calls out beseechingly: ‘Wait! I want to hear it too –
how can you leave me out?’ Her words alight on the water,
swallow it up and make it negotiable. She begins to cross, she
is almost there, and the vision melts painlessly into obscurity,
the voice into silence. Dunyazad waits; then opens her eyes. It
was no delusion then. The silky voice has an owner. Dilshad of
the teasing eyes and the fur-marked, laughing mouth sits by her
bedside, looking down at her (Hariharan, When Dreams Travel
71-72).

Several points emerge from this delusion. Firstly, Dunyazad’s search for
Shahrzad ends in a sense in Dilshad. This only confirms the natural cyclic
process of the mother-daughter relationship as the daughter turns into a
mother and the enigmatic relationship continues for generations. Secondly and
more importantly, the dream reveals the subconscious desire in Dunyazad to want to be ‘an accomplice on equal ground’. Such a relationship is now possible with Dilshad. “They are, Dunyazad realises with amazement, now talking as equals. Or if there is any imbalance of power, it is she, Dilshad, with her hints of forbidden knowledge, her unknown loyalties, who must dictate the terms of this new footing” (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 76). This disparity in favour of the daughter-figure becomes more evident when Dunyazad falters to tell a story to the sultan when she shares the royal bed with Shahryar. In the moment of crisis it is Dilshad who takes up the mantle, who speaks and saves the day for Dunyazad (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 261-262). But Dunyazad actually emerges victorious in her defeat. After Shahrzad, Dunyazad dons the mother's cloak; Dilshad is her beloved daughter. Dunyazad now stands for her illustrious sister, whereas her role has been taken up by Dilshad. The victory of Dilshad thus ensures the victory of the daughter, of Dunyazad in proxy.

But it is not always that Dunyazad falters. She has a story or two to narrate. Together on the bed with the slave-girl Dilshad, now freed for her services to Prince Umar, she must look into what the past holds for her; to see if it makes any sense at all. She is the perfect counterpoint to the imaginative Dilshad whose visionary flights soar far above the realms of probability.

Dunyazad knows there are storytellers and storyseekers. Her vocation is to search the story – to light up all its remote corners, not let a single detail escape. She cannot shake off a
lifetime of caution. Even in these games of imagination, she thinks, it pays to impose a little order. Her object is predetermined:... She stalks the old Shahrzad story with wary devotion, drawing obsessive rings round it like a predatory lover. She sees all memories and visions through this one prism.

Unlike her younger companion, Dunyazad has been trained in the art of storytelling by the most prodigious performer of all. But still she shuns the variety of possibilities that so dazzle her young friend, the exhibitionist risk of the first person narrative, or the glittering tinsel of shifting times, locales and fantasies. (She can almost hear Dilshad say to her indignantly: ‘Can you ask a coiled snake to stretch itself from one end to the other, lie frozen in a straight line?’) But Dunyazad’s talent is her sheer doggedness. Shahrzad’s story (and so hers) she will examine minutely, zealously, from every point of view that occurs to her – a pregnant Shahrzad, a dying Shahryar, a wazir in anguish, a young Prince Umar, a fiend-possessed Zaman, even the outsider Dilshad. She will never doubt the pre-eminence of this story, the nucleus of her existence. Though it has already been lived out, it still waits to be fathomed. She cannot let go of it (nor will it let go of her) till she has made some sense of it (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* 115-116).
An important question that arises is that why does Dunyazad, who is so prolific a story teller, who is so calculative in her venture as a narrator fails the moment she has to speak before the sultan? Is it merely an accident or does the apparent failure conveys something more important? A quick overview of the sequence from the viewpoint of some of the major French feminists suggests the impossibility of speech on part of the subsequent narrator in a chain of narration.

Sandra Gilbert in her illustrative essay "Literary Paternity" discusses the historical perspective of literary creativity and points to the numerous male authors who attribute their creative power to their bodily configuration. Thus the pen has been metaphorically equated to the penis in the annals of western literary discourse. Literary activity being a creative process must according to the patriarchal discourse be a biological phenomenon and more importantly be connected to the male body. This is obviously in contrast to common rationality as creativity as we see must emerge from the female body. Gilbert shows how throughout the history of Western culture, women have been associated with and confined to child-birth while men have been attributed to be progenitors of things immortal like works of art and literature.

Gilbert shows how strong the metaphor equating the pen and the penis has been in the Western cultural discourse and how it has robbed many a woman from wielding a pen. She concludes that women however found tools of writing different from the men. They probably wrote with milk, blood, perhaps on leaves and bark. Gilbert signifies that women’s creativity can be
seen in places and in ways different from that of man as she had no place in the tradition defined by the male authors.

Continuing the argument put forward by Gilbert, Cixous explores how women have been kept apart from the mainstream of Western lingual structural process. Drawing on Lacan she concludes that women and men enter into the Symbolic Order, into language as structure, differently. The naming of the centre of the Symbolic by Lacan as the phallus suggests how language is deeply rooted in the patriarchal system. Drawing on the phallocentric viewpoint of Lacan and the logocentric world that Derrida professes Cixous and Irigaray have coined a term phallogocentric to describe the Western cultural systems and structures. According to Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, a child must separate from the mother's body (the Real) to enter the world of the Symbolic. Cixous carrying Lacan's logic a step further argues that it is therefore impossible for the Symbolic structure of language to represent the female body. There is no place of female sexuality in the phallogocentric system – it is always defined in connection to the presence of a penis and as a result language proves to be insufficient to directly relate to the female body or to female sexual pleasure.

Women and men in Lacan's view are related to the Symbolic in different ways. Men misperceive themselves to be nearer to the centre of the Symbolic order because of their phallus while women cannot relate to it because of their lack of penis. Because of the distance of the women from the phallus the poststructuralist feminists like Cixous feel that women are closer to the
margins of the Symbolic structure. They are not firmly fixed to a definite meaning; rather they are closer to the world of the Imaginary, to dreams and fantasies.

Drawing on this distance from the phallus and hence the Symbolic order, Cixous concludes that "woman must write woman". She not only means that women must write about themselves, about their own stories but also that women must also learn to relate the signifier "woman" in a new way to the signifier "I". As female body and female sexuality cannot be captured within the Symbolic structure the writings by women have failed to make this connection. Women have written more as male authors than one belonging to their own sex. Cixous's call to women to write themselves is a step forward in "(re)claiming the female-centred sexuality" (Klages).

Dunyazad, steeped in tradition and burdened by the weight of a patriarchal structure over her, is not the fittest of the narrators to voice the dream of the powerless. The feminine narration is in need of an author much less encumbered by the tradition and vagaries of a male centred cultural pattern. What passes on in the ancient bedchamber is not only a bout of simple story-telling but a narration of the creative process as well. The metaphoric equivalent of the pen and the penis is very much evident in the narrative process. In fact, the sword placed between the sultan and Shahrzad signifies the metaphoric penis. It is because the threat of the sword is so much on Shahrzad that she is forced to talk. Her narration is, therefore, in a way the result of a sexual domination over her. What she creates, because of its
rootedness in the phallogocentric system, can in no way capture the feminine sexual or creative process. She thus becomes the mouthpiece of the very structure that she despises. Her sibling, Dunyazad, must also fall into the same trap because of her relationship to the phallogocentric structure. Dunyazad's association to the sultan, Shahryar, is primarily fixed in the dungeon which served to be the royal bedchamber. Her relationship to the sultan is defined by an insatiated physical relationship and hence she too is likely to be caught in the same mesh of sexual dominance like her elder sister. She is in no position to escape the phallogocentric Symbolic order that fails to capture women's sexuality and creativity. Hence, we see the need for change in narrator.

Dilshad, on the other hand is not in any way weighed down by the burden of the past. Because of her separation from the old order (we meet her in the new, more open section of the royal palace) she does not carry the baggage of the ancient period. She is absolutely free from the fetters of the phallogocentric structure. Her connection to the creative world is totally in relation to the women. While recreating the nights of yore, she is in bed with a woman, Dunyazad. Their companions on the floor – Satyasama and Shahrzad – also belong to the same sex. The sword in the middle is replaced by a mirror. If the sword stands for the metaphoric penis, the mirror may as well represent the metaphoric vagina. If the purpose of the journeys in the world of imagination is to have a dream or two for the powerless it is to be written in a language that captures the feminine sensibilities and sexuality. The lesbian
relationship that develops between Dunyazad and the slave girl Dilshad is in a way a challenge to the very root of the Western creative thought process which places the author in the male bracket and looks at creativity as a fundamentally biological act that must be connected to the possession of a phallus. But Dunyazad is not a proper ambassador of such a creative process. Playing the role of her more illustrious literary sister she becomes the mother figure, the one who dreams of the creative process but can never overcome the chains put around her by patriarchy. The slave girl, Dilshad, on the other hand in performing the role of the follower, serves as the daughter who can challenge her literary mother and the phallogocentric structure rooted in her. Dunyazad’s failure to narrate the story at the crucial time is not only the failure of an individual, but it is the failure of the phallogocentric structure to reveal the dreams, fears and sensibilities of the female sex. Women as Cixous argues must develop a language of their own so that the female centred sexuality may be reclaimed. The elevation of Dilshad as the crucial narrator is a step towards rediscovering a new language, a language that may capture the imagination, feeling and sexuality of women.

Another unique dimension of mother-daughter relationship may be explored in the novel if we consider When Dreams Travel itself to be – metaphorically speaking –the daughter novel following the footsteps of the Arabian Nights. To put forward such an argument we have to develop a new theoretical premise by which literary works, especially those by women writers
and influenced by works of the past may be treated as sharing a daughter's relationship with the preceding work of literature.

It seems useful in this context to draw upon Harold Bloom's theory of Anxiety of Influence as well as the psychoanalysts' study of the psychodynamics of family, especially with relation to mother daughter relationship. Bloom draws on the Oedipus complex that affects the relationship between a father and his son and concludes that an author who is enthused by a work of literature of the past shares a love-hate relation with his literary predecessor. On the one hand there is reverence for the master of the yesteryears, while on the other there is also an attempt to distance oneself from the literary father—figure.

In Bloom’s theory a poet (especially since the time of Milton) is motivated to compose when his imagination is seized upon by a poem or poems of a “precursor”, or father-poet. The “belated” poet’s attitudes to his precursor, like those in Freud’s analysis of the Oedipal relation of the son to father, are ambivalent; that is, they are compounded not only of admiration but also (since a strong poet feels a compelling need to be autonomous and absolutely original) of hate, envy, and fear of the father-poet’s pre-emption of the son’s imaginative space. The belated poet unconsciously safeguards his sense of his own autonomy and priority by reading a parent-poem “defensively,” in such a way as to distort it beyond his own
conscious recognition. Nonetheless, he cannot avoid embodying the malformed parent-poem into his own doomed attempt to write an unprecedentedly original poem; the most that even the best belated poet can achieve is to write a poem so "strong" that it effects an illusion of "priority"—that is, an illusion both that it has escaped the father-poem's precedence and that it exceeds it in greatness. (Abrams 240)

But contrary to Bloom's premise of writers trying to consciously avoid the influence of the 'father-poem', there are many writers, especially women, who tend to fall back upon past literary achievements, to give vent to their creative process. Intertextual texts have become a familiar means of feminist protest. But these works are not mere copies of the past works. Like the mother-daughter relationship these works too share a love-hate relationship between them. The woman writer is often moved by the desire of referring to a past work and brings it back to focus. But such a desire is actually shaped by a further craving for reinterpretation of the earlier text. Harold Bloom refers to poets who tend to "destroy the power of his precursors, and, normally, of one especially potent patriarchal precursor, while absorbing and transforming his strength and authority" (Hawthom 204). Like Oedipus, they too tend to kill their literary father in search of a space for their own. The woman writer on the other hand, refers back to a particular writing of the past, especially a writing in the patriarchal tradition and reinterprets it to suggest that a space was desirable for the women in the past, a space which was however, denied to
them. This 'misreading' (to use Bloom's term) is possible if the preceding text is regarded as a mother-text.

Psychoanalysts suggest that there is a difference in the growing up process of the girls from that of the boys. Though both have to separate from their primary love-object, their mother, the girls have to undergo a much more complex process. Chodorow suggests that the girls have to transfer their primary object choice from their mother to their father to attain heterosexual orientation. But this transfer does not necessarily substitute her pre-oedipal relationship to her mother. Because of the father's non-availability due to social reasons and because of the intensity of the early mother-daughter relationship the girl does not wholly transfer her affection to her father. Rather she maintains a complex psychic pattern where her father and mother appear in a relational triangle with her affection oscillating between the two.

This complex psychic mould affects a woman writer's writing pattern. The relational triangle shapes her writing pattern as well. She has to find both father and mother figures for the sake of writing. The patriarchal social structure often proves to be a ready substitute for the father figure. But the absence of suitable mother figures is a problem she has to encounter. Male writers overcome this dilemma by simply portraying writing as male hegemony. However, the woman writer is unable to do that as admitting that writing belongs to a purely male bastion makes it impossible for her to write. So she has to search for a mother. Often this search ends up in her mother. But there
are instances where any earlier writing actually becomes the substitute of the mother figure.

Nevertheless, here too the woman writer faces a problem. What she finds is merely a work of art belonging to the patriarchal tradition. The woman writer makes a deliberate ‘misreading’ of this work to look for the absent mother. The new interpretation of the preceding text then takes the form of quest for the mother, the mother who has been present but has remained unheard of. Such a mother has often turned into the voice of patriarchy itself as she has been solely steeped under such an oppressing system. The task of the new text is to give a new meaning to the precursor text, to explicitly recognise its presence. So instead of annihilating the predecessor as prophesied by Bloom, the woman writer actually brings back to life such texts which have a feminine potential. It is within the deep recesses of patriarchal setup that today’s writer tries to unveil the mother.

*When Dreams Travel* is an example of such ‘misreading’ of *Arabian Nights*. The celebrated Oriental Classic is definitely written from a patriarchal viewpoint. The stories of the lustful nights are often devised to cater to the male desire. Githa Hariharan’s novel sticks to the original pattern. *When Dreams Travel*, in many ways becomes the mirror-text of *Arabian Nights*. The weaving of stories goes on as in the original text. The setting is almost similar. But there are subtle differences too. Githa Hariharan concentrates on the narrators, instead of what is narrated, thus looking at the *Arabian Nights* from an entirely new angle. She concentrates on the missing figures in *Arabian*
Nights, on unveiling the lost characters. And in doing so the original work is
given a new attribute. It turns into a mother-text as its feminine potentials are
suddenly discovered. So whereas in the male tradition the writers tend to
annihilate the past works in order to seek their own identity, in the feminist
tradition the writers go on rediscovering, reshaping and reinterpreting the
precursor texts.

The intense rivalry and hostility between the mother and the daughter
often manifests itself in the form of recreating the mother – taking hold of her
life and giving shape to her – thereby overturning the power balance. The
daughter thus frees herself from the ghost of the mother and establishes an
identity of her own. In the literary sphere it may involve reinterpreting the
original text to add a new dimension to it. Thus the attempt is to make a
politically correct reading of the primal text and to simultaneously exercise
power over it.

Notes:

1. Irigaray speaking about the mother daughter relationship in her
celebrated essay “And the One Doesn’t Stir without the Other” says that “I’ll
leave us … I’ll live my life, my story” [Emphasis added] (Irigaray 66). It is worth
noting that in both Irigaray and Kapur, live and leave become the daughter’s
core words in relation to the mother.