Chapter 9

Conclusion
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The mother daughter dyad as presented in some of the Indian novels of the 1990s and explored in the present dissertation appears to be too complex an issue to lend itself to simple reductive generalizations. The relationship does not seem to fall into a definitive pattern as each of the mothers and daughters is distinct and unique in her approach and temperament. The rich complexity is indeed both baffling and challenging.

Whereas an examination of the Western critique on mother daughter relationship generally tends to focus on the daughter's need to rebel against the mother and the resultant complexities in the relationship, it is worth noting that in the Indian context a near perfect relationship between the mother and daughter figures seems to be possible under certain circumstances. However, this is achieved only when these women stand at a distance from each other, owing to the fact of their being not biological mothers and daughters. The close bonding prevalent in the Indian familial and social set up often allows these distant figures to closely connect and interact but nevertheless, the emotional space possible in such relationships makes them less constricting.

Quite opposite to this stand some mother daughter pairs who remain hostile to each other all through their lives. It may be noted that such duos are invariably biological mothers and daughters. These relationships are usually made to function in the presence of a strong patriarchal figure to whom the mother is either totally subservient or with whom she shares a very uneasy
relation and yet cannot reject him totally. The daughter tries to escape from
the uncomfortably predominant presence of such a father or a father-figure
who is creating a fissure in her relationship with her mother.

A balance can be found in the bond between mothers and daughters in
certain cases, where the relationship is simultaneously amiable and hostile. It
tends to be the most ubiquitous kind of relation between the mothers and the
daughters. The societal pressures compel the mothers to try to impose the
traditional norms on their daughters which the latter tend to reject. The
resultant attrition between the two, however, eventually gives way to a much
congenial relationship with growing mutual understanding – generally with the
increasing maturity of the daughter.

Another trend evident in the mother daughter relationship in the novels
of the fin de siecle Indian women novelists writing in the 1990s is the
daughter’s quest for the ‘lost’ mother and her attempt to bring back the mother
into focus. The daughter feels that the mother has been largely neglected by
her near ones and the society at large and it becomes her sacred duty to
rejuvenate her mother and restore her to the place she deserves. It is in a
sense the daughter’s tribute to her mother. Often the quest is not so much for
the biological mother as for the cultural and literary mother whose influence
shapes the works of the later day women, who assume the role of
writer/narrator, bent on depicting and reconstructing the ‘lost’ mother from the
faded palimpsests of family annals or local chronicles.
However, the opposite trend is also quite common where the mother, because of her superior position in the cultural domain, often tends to overshadow the daughter herself. The daughter then takes up the pen more as a weapon against her mother rather than making it a means of paying her homage. She tries to recreate the mother, to shape her, and thereby assert her own independence. The daughter's creation of the mother thus assumes the dimension of a journey from a marginal to a central position; and it is her mother that she must overthrow in order to affirm her centrality.

These diverse trends, as reflected in the writings of the different women novelists in India in the 1990s, show the multifaceted dimension of the mother daughter relationship and portray how almost each of the relationships is unique. But taken together, we may conclude that these relationships demonstrate a definite development of the feminist awareness in the literary/cultural arena. The movement starts with the acknowledgement of the centrality of the mother daughter relationship in the lives of women and demonstrates how much vitalising such a bond may be. However, gradually the daughter must discover that her mother represents the voice of patriarchy trying to impose all the curbs on her that a traditional society demands. The result of such detection proves fatal for the relationship and the mother and the daughter show an unparalleled degree of animosity. The growing separation compels the mother and the daughter to ponder over what has gone wrong and with developing maturity the daughter often comes to understand how her mother cannot be held responsible for any or many of her
decisions or actions. Thus the relationship switches between two extreme ends making it a most enigmatic one. The daughter’s unearthing of the fact of her mother’s being a slave to the patriarchal machinery and yet having no place in the societal sphere prompts the daughter to rediscover her mother and give her a place under the sun. But the daughter is also afraid of the mother assuming a central position and therefore tries to recreate her mother as a means of wielding control over her, thereby laying a claim on centrality herself.

One important feature in the mother daughter relationship – as envisioned in the fin de siècle Indian novels – seems to emerge from this discussion. The relationship is predominantly analysed from the daughter’s perspective. Very rarely do we see a mother voicing her thoughts, and even if she is doing so, it is more of her voice as a daughter to her own mother than a mother to her daughter that we seem to hear. The daughter’s centrality in the relationship therefore, we may conclude, is owing to the portrayal of the mother daughter relation generally as a way of protest. The daughter assumes the progressive voice compared to her mother and the women writers generally highlighting the feminist cause thereby tend to adapt the voice of the daughter.

The mirror is one of the key images that pervade the fin de siècle novels by the Indian women writers. The image seems to operate at many
levels. Firstly, as Irigaray suggests, the mirror brings out the similarity between the mother and the daughter, thereby creating an identity crisis for the latter. The daughter, therefore, seems to have no choice but to rebel against her mother simply to carve out an identity of her own. However, the mirror image does not only bring out the hostile façade of the mother-daughter relationship. As the daughter's image merges into that of her mother, which again merges into that of the grandmother – the continuity of the female tradition is established. As "one woman leads to another" (Atwood 14) the daughter realises that she carries in her a bit of her mother, grandmother and other foremothers as well. This point is best illustrated by the following excerpt from Sylvia Plath's poem "All the Dead Dears":

From the mercury backed glass
Mother, grandmother, great grandmother
Reach me, hug hands to have me in.

Lastly, the mirror image has also been used in some of the novels studied in this dissertation as a symbol of the imaginative world – a world of dreams and visions – a world which the women inherit. Therefore, the mirror in this context stands for a creative process which is distinctly feminine.

It becomes quite evident from the above discussion that the continuity of the female chain of relationships is an important feature of the fin de siècle novels by the Indian women novelists writing in the 1990s. This continuity is often evoked by bringing forth the figure of the grandmother, who more often
than not is a mother figure in her own right. Hence, many of the novels studied in this dissertation have split mothers, just as Olaya Asyelon in her novel / 
Know why the Caged Bird Sings (1969), presents twin mother figures in the form of the mother and the mother's mother, Momma. The splitting of the mother figure serves to show how every mother daughter relationship is a part of the eternal cycle and how every woman is indebted to her foremothers for being what she is. It may be interesting to recall in this context the following lines from Margaret Atwood's poem "A Red Shirt":

This is the procession
of old leathery mothers,...
passing the work from hand to hand,
mother to daughter,
a long thread of red blood, not yet broken (Atwood 48).

Another feature that emerges in the mother daughter relationship in the writings of the recent Indian women novelists is the impact of the familial and social settings in determining the course of such a relation. The Indian mother daughter pair can hardly, if at all afford isolation and exclusivity, and their relationship may only be studied in the context of the family to which they belong. In this regard the Indian scenario is almost akin to the Black culture where also the importance of the family is held supreme. The close tie with the family and the society makes the mother daughter dyad much more vulnerable to the conditioning impact of patriarchal ethos.
The onus of bringing forth children, especially male ones, lies quite heavy on an average Indian wife. But her ordeal does not end there. She is also made responsible for the upbringing of the children; the fathers being often distant figures in an Indian household the mother remains accountable for any shortcoming on part of her children. When it comes to nurturing a daughter the mother is especially liable to prepare her for her marital home. She is expected to enforce the strict disciplinarian codes on her daughter so that the latter may not find it difficult to adjust in the home of her in-laws. As a consequence, the daughter often experiences her paternal home, and especially the curbs enforced on her there, entirely through her mother.

Again, in spite of the similarity between the mother daughter relationship in the Indian social spectrum and among the Black community of Afro-America there is a wide gulf between the two with regard to the daughter’s response to the cultural background. The Black women feel themselves to have been uprooted from the rightful place to which their ancestors once belonged and long for their ancient traditions. Simultaneously, they feel they are already removed from their native culture and people and that it was neither possible nor perhaps altogether desirable to go back to their original heritage. Hence, they share an ambivalent attitude to their cultural past. In contrast to this phenomenon the modern Indian women show an unequivocal departure from their culture and they try to disengage themselves from the burden of such legacy. They feel that it is often because of their
tradition that they have been reduced to a secondary position in the society. Hence, any decisive thrust for forging ahead must involve complete freedom from such binding heritage. In the writings of the Indian women novelists, interrogation of the tradition finds expression in the way of retelling of myths, changing the focal point of well-established classics, breaking the social taboos, rejecting familial power centres like fathers and husbands, rewriting the history by emphasising on mother figures and in extreme cases even rejection of the mother or mother-figure altogether. Again, the naming of some of the women characters in the studied novels after mythical and legendary women, noted for their sincerity and devotion to their husbands, seem to be a deliberate ploy of the novelists to bring out how traditional values are evoked even today to make women subservient to the age-old and continuing patriarchal ethos.

A necessary compulsion of Indian women writers writing in English is that they have to cater to the urban middle class who represent a specific layer of culture and taste, sense and sensibilities. In the novels discussed in the present dissertation there are very few instances where we find any reference to the so-called lower class of women. Even if there are one or two exceptions these women are undoubtedly urban and urbane and often dominated by their middle class counterparts. One reason for such a class bias may be the composition of the target audience. But one feels that other reasons are there as well. The rise of the feminist voice is more of an urban phenomenon
confined to the educated middle class women. Though during the freedom movement in India women came out of the closet and their condition improved considerably all across the country, much of the development on this front was lost during the subsequent decades. It is only the English educated, urban, politically suave, upwardly mobile women who have at last acquired a degree of awareness and articulation and can thus take advantage to some extent of the constitutionally sanctioned rights of independent India. So even if it appears that women are gradually being able to protest against the male chauvinist society and explore their relations with their mothers as a means of such protest, there is no denying the fact that in view of the total Indian context such dissent is quite constricted in its scope.

Feminist movement, particularly in the West, has tried to define the role of the modern mother and has searched for the right alternative between employment and motherhood as the true vocation of present day women. The novels discussed in this dissertation – in spite of their pro-urban bias – conspicuously tend to shy away from this problematics. The Indian metros have witnessed an exponential growth in the number of working mothers; yet the predicament faced by most working women in balancing between home and workplace is generally glossed over. This apparent paradox is probably due to the fact that most of the characters who speak out in these novels are daughters/daughter figures, whose mothers seldom ventured into the workplace. Even in the case of the few noticeable exceptions the large families more often than not cocooned these daughters into a sense of security. One
presumes that with more mothers venturing out into the workplace and the families turning nuclear the daughters of the next generation will address this problem once they begin to voice their problems and aspirations.

Thematically the novels tend to show a movement towards a female centred creative process. It is achieved by bringing the process of creation into focus. The mothers are made the objects of focus and it is only through the daughter's lens that one gets such a view, making the entire creative process a women's paradigm. The acknowledgement of the mother is a way of forsaking the patriarchal tradition which has hardly cared for women in general. The daughter also takes liberty in reconstructing the mother, thus not simply exercising power and control over her mother but also discarding the male creative tradition in the process.

Finally, studying the intricacies of the above filial relationship in the modern Indian literary context has been a challenging and rewarding work and exploration of the portrayal of the relationship with reference to some selective fin de siecle novels by women authors has allowed us a glimpse of a rich deconstructive and reconstructive process that attempts to cleanse, restore and re-inscribe the palimpsest of personal memories and cultural scripts.