Chapter 1

Introduction
"The fact remains: the relationship of women to their mothers and to other women – thus towards themselves – are subject to total narcissistic ‘black out’; these relationships are completely devalued. Indeed, I have never come across a woman who does not suffer from the problem of not being able to resolve in harmony, in the present system, her relationship with her mother and with other women" (Irigaray, “Women’s Exile” 75). The problematics of the relationship between a ‘mother’ and her ‘daughter’ have been increasingly engaging the attention of feminist writers across the globe, especially since the last decades of the previous century. This can be seen in mainstream British literature as well as in Afro-American writing, Canadian writing or in writing by Indian women of our times. We have, metaphorically speaking, so many ‘daughters’ looking back to their own ‘mother’s garden’ (a la Alice Walker), as well as mothers looking forth to their own daughters.

The daughters’ enquiry into their mothers’ lives from the feminist perspective generally highlights some interesting and conflicting features. Firstly, the mothers are relegated to the footnotes of the annals of history so that the entire socio-cultural-political space turns to be a male bastion. Yet paradoxically it is the mothers who turn to be the most vociferous adherents of the patriarchal ideology in order to earn social respectability. The psychosocietal condition of the mothers has a direct bearing on the lives of the daughters as well, who have to simultaneously surmount the crippling influences of their mothers in their quest for personality development and
suffer from a low self-esteem due to the lowly status of their mothers in family and society. To overcome such a constricting influence the daughter sometimes has to assert against her mother's 'rule'. The rebellion, however, occurs not only at personal level but is also seen as part of a wider social context of feminist protest. This relational dynamics between the mother and the daughter has been increasingly emerging as an important facet in feminist literature – both creative and critical. However, the nature of the relationship displays a remarkable variety corresponding to the varying socio-cultural setting of such literary works.

Prior to the 1970s the mother daughter dyad generally used to occupy a marginal space in the Western feminist discourses. However, the growing emphasis on the psychoanalytic dimension of the pre-oedipal mother daughter bond in the 1970s concurrently generated a significant trend in feminist thinking which began to address the richness and complexity of the mother daughter relationship. The women writers in various parts of the globe simultaneously embarked upon the task of representing this highly ambivalent and conflictual relationship in their works. The mainstream feminist critics have liberals drawn upon feminist revisions of psychoanalytic theories to set up the frameworks upon which to study the literary texts. Such a theoretical position has stressed the importance of the early relationship of the daughter with the mother, which, it is believed, goes on to influence the relationship in the subsequent years or the daughter's adulthood as well.
The black feminist approach varies widely from the white critics' overwhelming emphasis on the psychoanalytical studies which view the mother daughter relationship as being shaped primarily during the initial years. The specifically black feminist approach calls for a discussion of the black feminist filial relationship within the context of the black family network rather than an exclusive mother daughter dyad. Such criticism tends to stress the centrality of the extended family and the "resilient woman-centred networks of blood mothers and other mothers" (Collins 47). The other issues which are of interest in the black mother daughter relationship include the shared history of injustice of slavery in which mothers and children were forcibly separated from each other, the continued sexism in both black and white communities and racial inequality. Writers who have tended to focus on the various aspects of the mother daughter relationship within the black community include Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Paule Marshall, Zora Neale Hurston, Gwendolyn Brooks, Maya Angelou and Sonia Sanchez.

The treatment, of course necessarily, varies from author to author and place to place. For instance, the problem is particularly notable in the case of the Afro-Caribbean women writers, staying in the First World countries, who experience the mother daughter relationship in a trichotomous situation. Beside the existence of the biological or surrogate mother they must also acknowledge the presence of the motherlands – Africa and the Caribbean – and the mother-country represented by England, France and/or North America, in which they presently live. Such a trichotomy makes the relationship
complex as well as conflicting. Though motherhood is essentially an act of nurturance, it is plagued by ambivalence in the present case, the conflict being furthered by colonial intervention from the 'other', the colonial mothercountry.

Apart from the ambivalent relationship with the mother and the mother's land the daughter must resolve the conflict borne out of the absence of the mother from her life. It sends the daughter into a desperate quest for a selfhood and a home space. This quest forces and forges the creation of an 'imagined homeland' and the re-validation of 'old ways and cultures' preserved by the mother. The act of creating such an imagined homeland enables the individual to acquire 'wholeness,' which permits a spiritual return to the motherland, Africa, via the Caribbean. This spiritual return or homecoming, through the living and practicing of the old culture, makes possible the acceptance and celebration of the mother's land (Alexander).

Latin American literature, on the other hand, is characterised by pervasive daughter-centrism that often leads to an identity crisis for the mother figures. The mothers are generally portrayed as stereotype figures, often mere caricatures of their real selves. The daughters show a sense of contempt for their mothers for not living up to the image of the 'ideal' mothers and are dismissive of them at the same time for carrying the burdens of patriarchy. However, this does not imply any lack of attachment between the mother and the daughter. The mother is often castigated by the daughter since she believes that her mother does not love her as she does her son. The maternal
figure thus appears to embody the patriarchal spirit by reducing herself into a repetitive role, making many women feel entrapped in the presence of their mothers. The daughters therefore, tend to reject their mothers as they fear to be replications of the mothers and thus reduce themselves to the status of being 'perfect' mothers that must in turn perpetuate the endless re-scripting of the same old story.

A recent development in Latin American women's narrative, however, has been the search for the matrilineal roots. The lack of respect for female knowledge based on the assumption that masculine interpretation of the world can only give a sense of rational understanding of reality has created lack of communication between different generations. These novels stress how women have to suffer without the benefit of the experience and knowledge of their mothers and grandmothers. The quest for the memories of the female predecessors brings out the necessity of an alternative knowledge and reconstructing the gender equations.

The recent Indian literary scenario, again, is characterised by certain unique features of its own in this regard. The decade of the 1990s witnessed the publication of a number of novels by Indian women writers, which appear remarkable for their portrayal of the varied facets of Indian womanhood – both traditional and modern – and their assertion of the rights of women in defiance of the traditional socio-cultural approaches in India vis-à-vis women.
It is interesting to note how in these fin de siècle novels of the '90s the mother daughter relationship comes to the focus. Though these texts are directed against the age-old patriarchal ethos operating through the social environment, the familial-social traditions and the myths and lores – the influence of which makes the women especially vulnerable – it is basically through the above relationship that the discourses of protest find expression.

These novels usually dwell upon the emergence of women from marginality to centrality, from role to individuality. But the filial relationship, complex and baffling as it is, seems to provide the basic frame upon which these themes are made to evolve. The writers have explored from various angles the ambivalences and paradoxes of the relationship, the 'difficulties' it involves, its reconcilement of, or failure to, resolve elements of hostility and amity; and the act of exploration itself becomes a way of feminist protest. In most of the cases the mother figures accept the socially imposed constructs which make them simultaneously the worst victims and the most vocal supporters of the patriarchal values. The mother often symbolises the paralyzing force of the family in its structuration of personality and limitation of potential. The daughters have to rebel against such engulfment by the maternal though in some cases the mother and the daughter finally reach a natural and better understanding of each other's compulsions, constraints and predicaments.

At the same time the daughters continue their quest for a way out of their socially determined role as wife and mother – either through profession or
politics, art or other pursuits. It is interesting to note the way the two
generations of women differ, clash and ultimately cohere or drift apart as the
case may be. These novels of the 1990s seem to illustrate the perception
highlighted by Luce Irigaray in her essay “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without
the Other”.

The present dissertation proposes to explore the various ways of
feminist assertion and protest as projected through the dynamics and
problematics of the mother daughter relationship in the following texts, which
have been written by women novelists in India in the last decade of the last
millennium:

Githa Hariharan’s

_The Thousand Faces of Night_ (1992)

_When Dreams Travel_ (1999)

Shashi Deshpande’s

_The Binding Vine_ (1993)

_A Matter of Time_ (1996)

_Small Remedies_ (2000)

Namita Gokhale’s


Manju Kapur’s


Arundhati Roy’s

_The God of Small Things_ (1997)
The decade of the '90s has witnessed the opening up of Indian economy, a greater correlation with the world outside and rapid urbanisation. Women - at least a cross section - have often been beneficiaries of such a development. They have made use of the opportunity to emerge from tradition-defined roles to ascertain their individuality. Consequently, there has been a great splurge in narratives by and about Indian women during this decade. As these novels depict strong, individualistic women characters who pass through varying degrees of trauma and yet stand on their own, they are also stories of two generations of women playing mutually destructive, and/or supportive/regenerative roles. Indeed the dynamics of this relationship seems crucial to the cultural definition of femininity, feminism and the 'female' (a la Showalter) in the emerging Indian context.

The present dissertation proposes to examine some select fin de siecle novels with respect to the above. The first three chapters are so planned as to chalk out the theoretical premise of my dissertation, whereas chapters 4 – 8 will focus on the study of the mother daughter relationship in the specific novels mentioned above. Chapter 9 is the concluding one. It is followed by 'Appendix' which includes analyses of some of the critical reactions to the fin de siecle novels studied in this dissertation.
While the present Chapter, i.e. Chapter One, is intended to introduce the subject, Chapter Two will examine the Western feminist discourses in relation to motherhood and mother daughter relationship. Chapter Three offers a quick glimpse of socio-historical-literary backdrop vis-à-vis the lives of Indian women. The first part of this chapter concentrates on the various social institutions that seem to play a very definitive role on the lives of the Indian women. The second part, on the other hand, focuses on the social history of the Indian women since the early 19th century which actually marks the beginning of the beginning in the context of our present study. The third section looks at the writings of the Indian women writers in English. Chapters Four, Five and Six will explore the ambiguous love-hate relationship between the mother/mother-figures and the daughter/daughter-figures in the novels as mentioned above. Whereas the close relations between the mother and the daughter figures will be analysed in Chapter Four, the following chapter on the other hand will examine some instances of a hostile relationship. The ambivalent relationship where love and hatred between the mothers and the daughters are inextricably intermixed will be studied in Chapter Six. Chapters Seven and Eight will examine the daughter figure as she is engaged in the writing process whereby she would recreate her mother. In the last chapter or ‘Conclusion’ I shall try to see what inferences can be drawn from this exploration.
Notes:

1. The novels of Jamaica Kincaid, Maryse Condé, and Paule Marshall tend to explore the mother daughter relationship in a trichotomous situation.

2. The narrators of Gioconda Belli’s (Nicaragua) *La mujer habitada*, Rosario Castellanos’s (Mexico) *Balún-Canán*, Albalucía Angel’s (Colombia) *Estaba la pájara pinta sentada en el verde limón*, and Marta Brunet’s (Chile) *La mampara* portray their mothers not as individuals but as social caricatures.

3. *Dreaming* by Cuban-American Cristina García and *La casa de los espíritus* by Chilean Isabel Allende focus on the need to unearth mother’s stories in order to learn from them and, above all, to reconsider and construct new gender roles.

4. The term is the French for “end of the century” and is generally used to refer to the works produced in the last years of any century. The term is often specifically used to reflect the transitions in literature in the 1890s, when French, English and American writers were beginning to break free from the constraints and polite conventions of the Victorian era. The term, however, is used here as well as throughout the dissertation to denote the literature of the Indian women writers in the 1990s, who, apart from writing at the “end of the century”, try to envision a new social order through their writings.