Chapter 2

The Premise
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Setting any theoretical premise for the mother daughter relationship as depicted in literature is a difficult endeavour because of the various and often conflicting critical conjectures surrounding it. The task becomes trickier when one tries to analyse such a relationship in the Indian context as the critical discourses are mostly of Western origin. One has to be cautious in applying such theories in the Indian context since what may seem to be valid by the Western parameter may not hold good in the present perspective. However, given the educational, social and cultural background of the women writers explored in this dissertation, it may not be preposterous to assume that these women writers, who usually hail from a middle class/elitist background, are more often than not aware of occidental thought patterns, which may have gone a long way in shaping their mind and art. They may also have the English knowing audience in mind when they take up the pen. As a consequence, there is a possibility of the various critical premises in the Western discourses on mother daughter relationship influencing the writings of the Indian women novelists right from the start. Again, many of these premises are not exactly culture specific and hence may prove to be true for any discussion of mother daughter relationship in the literature of either of the two hemispheres. The major critical theories regarding the subject can again be subdivided into two related categories: one addressing motherhood and its various psychic, social, emotional, cultural dimensions; the other focussing various facets of the mother daughter relationship.
Section I: Motherhood

Pregnancy and Childbirth:

According to Simone de Beauvoir, maternity is one of the major factors governing a woman's life, and it is from her very childhood that she prepares to play such a role. The attitude towards maternity is a complex phenomenon and one has to pass through various phases before actually becoming a mother. For a little girl it is “a miracle and a game” (Beauvoir 510) and her nurturance of her doll is the prelude to her mothering of her future baby. The adolescent daughter on her part is not so sure about maternal bliss and often considers motherhood to be a threat to her individuality. Often it leads to an ambivalence of attitude on her part. It may seem to her at once frightening and something to cherish about. During pregnancy a woman's adolescent anxieties and fear of childbirth return and her reaction to it is governed by the environment she is in and the nature of relationship with her close ones.

In Beauvoir's view, a woman by way of becoming the mother emancipates herself completely from her own mother. If she is sincerely desirous of being a mother, it is easy for her to cope with pregnancy. But for women who are still babes of their mothers or who are over-anxious, pregnancy and childbirth often prove to be nightmarish. Even an estranged relationship with one's mother and the guilt feeling associated with it does not in any way help in the situation of pregnancy.

Another important factor that governs a woman's attitude to pregnancy and childbirth is her relationship with her husband. In some extreme cases
women want children exclusively to themselves, but in most cases the woman
needs love and care and understanding from her husband to help her go
through her new responsibilities.

Pregnancy leads a woman into a physiological and psychological state
that is unique and is responsible for many of her ambivalent attitudes. It is in
Beauvoir's words “a drama that is acted out within the woman herself. She
feels it as at once an enrichment and an injury; the foetus is a part of her body,
and it is a parasite that feeds on it; she possesses it, and she is possessed by
it; it represents the future and, carrying it, she feels herself vast as the world;
but this very opulence annihilates her, she feels that she herself is no longer
anything” (Beauvoir 512).

Pregnancy has been valorised and idealised as a creative process,
albeit a passive one. It is supposed to give the woman the meaning of her
existence¹. But this culture-stimulated euphoria about the so-called creative
process is somewhat illusory. The woman feels the growth of the baby within
her, but it is something which is determined by the forces of nature and
beyond her control. Thus her thought oscillates between the two extreme ends
as she simultaneously dreams that her child would be a ‘hero’ and fears that it
may turn out to be a ‘monster’. Again another set of diverse thought pattern
operates in a pregnant mother. On the one hand she feels that through her
child she herself would be immortalised, while on the other she is made to feel
something corresponding to the Hegelian warning: “The birth of children is the
death of parents” (quoted in Beauvoir 514). Translated from the metaphorical to crude literary terms, the feeling often gets merged in her fear that the process of childbirth may be at the cost of her own life.

A woman’s attitude to pregnancy changes radically with every passing stage of foetal growth. At the initial stage when the woman comes to know about her impregnation from various physical conditions, the baby is not present; it exists only in her imagination. Gradually with the development of the foetus within her, she becomes a passive object invaded by the mysterious forces of creation and her subjection to the external forces frightens her, which finds manifestation in her morning sickness and nausea.

As pregnancy advances, the relation between the mother and her would-be child changes. As the latter makes its presence felt and a biological interaction begins to take place between the two, the mother too begins to feel more secure. Now she feels to be in complete control of her child.

During the last stages of pregnancy, the harmony between the foetus and the mother can be disrupted to some extent. While some women marvel at the presence of an independent self, the same realization makes others repugnant. So long the child existed only in the mother’s imagination; now it is someone real.

The reaction to childbirth varies greatly in different women, but generally all suffer from a dilemma due to the tension arising out of conflicting desires. The mother desires to retain the growing self within her as it becomes
"treasured portion of her ego" (Beauvoir 521), while simultaneously desiring to get rid of it. On the one hand she wants to have her dream finally handed over to her, while on the other the fear of new responsibilities makes childbirth dreadful. Either of the two desires may eventually dominate over the other, but she is often torn between them initially.

Again the first response of the mother to her child varies as widely as her reaction to the event of childbirth. Some women suffer from the emptiness created when the child is born. They feel that a part of them has been torn from them forever. But more than that there is the sense of curiosity. It is strange to be in touch with one who has grown within her. She wants to experience the child as a part of her, like her body parts, but it has got a separate identity. It is opaque, impenetrable and the mother cannot even recognize it. The mental picture with innumerable possibilities during the pregnancy is now reduced to a tiny, finite individual – a real self with its own vulnerabilities and demands. The joy of being with the baby is therefore mixed with the regret to find that the dream of infinite probabilities must come to an end.

However, in most cases a new bond is established as the mother nurses the child. An animal relationship develops between the two and the mother is happy to revert back to a state of carelessness towards her other duties and responsibilities, a state akin to one experienced during pregnancy. But on the other hand, many women are alarmed by the new responsibilities and the demands of the new-born, which must be fulfilled. Often the mother
suffers physically, as she slaves for the infant. This may result in a strange love-hate feeling for the child.

The woman also finds in her child the satisfaction of an erotic impulse in much the same way as a man derives satisfaction in woman. This satisfaction comes from domination and not surrender. The baby is in the mother’s eye both a prey and a *double*, who can be dominated upon. It is quite interesting to note that a mother murmurs the words of a lover, caresses, kisses, and hugs in the same manner.

Just like a beloved, a mother feels elated at being necessary to her child. But what makes it more problematic is that she can expect no reciprocity for her actions which a beloved always does. A child has no values and hence takes its mother’s cares for granted, leaving the mother herself to justify her actions.

The condition of the women in the society also affects the children to a large extent. The mothers being women can hardly get a chance to freely express their sexuality or individuality, are controlled and dominated by men and have little control over the life they lead. Naturally all these result in frustration, which again finds its expression in dealing with the children. A mother thrashes her child not only to punish it alone, but also a man, the world and herself.

The mothers often try to treat their children as dolls, or little slaves who should obey each of their whims. Such mothers expect a lot from their children...
in return for the care they bestow upon them. These mothers try to model their children upon some ideal and failure to do so leave them more frustrated.

"Another common attitude, and one not less ruinous to the child, is masochistic devotion, in which the mother makes herself the slave of her offspring to compensate for the emptiness of her heart and to punish herself for her unavowed hostility" (Beauvoir 529-30). She renounces all her pleasures and takes the role of a victim to deny her child any independence. She often does this to dominate her child by making it feel guilty.

It is greatly difficult for a mother to shape a child, who is mysterious and turbulent, according to a preconceived pattern. The adult words of reason are hardly enough to convince him. The problem is often quite acute. The primary objective for the mother is to prevent the child from harming other things or itself. Therefore, restrictions are imposed upon him/her, which s/he hardly understands. Naturally, the child rebels against the mother. The child cannot understand his/her mother's explanations, "for she cannot penetrate into his consciousness; his dreams, his fears, his obsessions, his desires, make up a world into which she cannot see: the mother can only control, blindly and from without, a being who finds her irrelevant rules an absurd imposition" (Beauvoir 531). This problem of lack of comprehension continues even when the child grows up and develops a world of interests in which the mother cannot enter. The problem the mother faces is enormous: "it is the attempt to control a being with whom you are not in communication and who is none the less a human
being, to obtrude yourself upon an independent stranger who is defined and affirmed only in revolting against you" (Beauvoir 531).

Stages of Motherhood:

A profound and in-depth study of the successive stages of motherhood is made in Ann Dally's work *Mothers: Their Power and Influence*. Dally emphasises the importance of understanding the proper significance of motherhood; she begins her book with the sentence “He who would understand himself need first to understand his mother” (Dally 1). She is quick to point out that the principle holds out to be equally true for daughters too.

Dally analyses mother-child relationship and finds that a mother may experience her children in three ways: first, she may feel it to be a part of her and feel it to be *enclosed* within her; second, she may consider the child to be an *extension* of her and third, she may experience her child to be a *separate* being.

These three ways in which the mother-child relationship can be analysed, roughly correspond to the age of the child and each stage is governed by its unique physical and psychological conditions. However, these stages have no rigid boundaries, and can and do overlap each other. Again, the three stages may not be equally prominent in every mother; often one or two stages gain predominance at the cost of the other(s).

The first psychological stage, i.e. *enclosure*, corresponds to the physical state of pregnancy. However, the stage begins only in the later part of
pregnancy, when the child makes its presence felt and continues throughout its infancy. At this time the mother feels the child to be part of her own self. During this stage the child's entire interaction is with its mother, so much so that she comprises its entire environment. Both the mother and child remain absorbed in each other during this period and the feelings governing the child's entire life are cultivated. The stage is marked by its "physical sensations and feelings of securities and insecurities" (Dally 9).

The stage of enclosure corresponds most closely to that of animals and is primarily driven by instinct. Consequently, the child suffers greatly if and when, the environment, within the mother or outside is disrupted. The implications of this stage are most profound and continue to influence the child in his/her later life. The child is physically dependent upon the mother during this period and the stage continues till the child is two to three years old. The mother's function during this stage is to nurse the child.

The stage of enclosure is immediately followed by the extension stage, the physical counterpart of which is the state of infancy when the physical demand of the child diminishes gradually. The exact beginnings and endings of this period cannot be rigidly determined but the stage is generally operative when the child is two to four years old and may continue till it reaches adolescence. The mother, at this stage, experiences the child as an extension of herself. "He feels her as a sort of matrix, a supporting background that gives him confidence and enables him to develop and mature" (Dally 10).
As human children are dependent on their parents for a very long time, this particular stage is unique to human beings. The child at this state is no longer absolutely dependent on its mother, and given a suitable environment it can cope on its own. But practically it is still very much dependent on its parents who provide for it. The stage is marked by the development of complex human characteristics and cultural behaviours like communication skills, motivation, habitual behaviour, adult attachments between parents and children. In short, it prepares the child for the ensuing adult life.

The third stage is that of separation. Generally this stage corresponds to the physical state of adolescence. The stage is vital as it determines how young people attain or fail to attain fulfilment and the feeling of self-determination.

At this stage the mother and child exist as separate persons and recognize each other to be the same. This period is marked by the consciousness that the child is a mature and independent person and the realization that the mother too is an independent being who has her needs and life apart from the child. The last stage sees the emergence of the adult personality and an increasingly harmonious relationship based on love and mutual respect. The period is also marked by storms and upheavals and disagreement of adolescence and adult life.

The influence of a mother on a child moulds the latter throughout his/her life and is percolated to future generations. The child goes on absorbing behavioural patterns, attitudes, qualities from its mother and shapes
its reaction to it. "What is imparted at each stage influences the development of the personality, basic feelings about the self and its relation to the world...– transient, superficial, lasting and close" (Dally 12). It therefore dictates a person's course of life, his/her ability to cope with social and personal situations and develops his/her characteristic features.

Very few mothers can handle all the three stages with equal competence. Many face problem at one or more stages, but generally the results are not disastrous. Most mothers generally compensate for failure at one stage by coping better at the other stages. But such failure is not without effect as different kinds of mothering at each of the three stages lead to the formation of different kinds of personalities. As a result of such apparent failures at some of the stages the variations between different individuals can develop.

In a normal course of development each stage is perfectly harmonised with the next one or the preceding one, and naturally no distinct line of demarcation exists between the various stages. Most importantly each of the stages retains the healthy residue of its previous stage. "So each stage contains the seeds or relics of other stages and, in so far as it does not, it is altered, perhaps damaged or impoverished, perhaps made unusual, eccentric or endowed with special qualities" (Dally 14).

Dally holds intuition and imagination to be vital for motherhood. Mothers who do not possess such qualities of mind often find it difficult to raise their children, who in turn find their relationships with their mother unsatisfactory.
One need not be fully aware of one's intuitions and imaginations, but it is necessary to recognize the conflict between her own self and that of her children. Suppressing or denying such conflict between the two selves can only make the relationship more problematic.

Instinct also plays its role in the predicament of the mother by controlling her inward drives. But such instinctual relations are further complicated and very much tempered by the conditions and circumstances that one experiences in one's life. Both the present and past conditions of a mother's own being and becoming, influence her mothering. In fact, she is most affected by the mothering she herself received and by her own reaction to it.

Mothering in a Modern Society:

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. In Europe and United States of America during the 1970s, the emphasis was primarily put on employment of women which was to serve as a means for betterment of women's condition and their liberation. The period witnessed Wages for Housework campaign, domestic labour debate and so on. The focus thus was clearly on the earning potential of the women. Lynne Segal (Is the Future Female?) points out about the negligence of mothering and childcare during this period. However, she also notes about 'maternal
revivalism' that went on along with the wage movements. Segal finds during the 1970s "an increasing emphasis on motherhood as a source of power and pleasure for women, and as the site which implicitly or explicitly contains assumptions about the inherent differences between women and men" (Tuula 42). So the emphasis of feminism during this period is not so much upon the issue of gender parity as upon differences between men and women and the strong points of womanhood. Motherhood in this connection gives women a place of prominence and power.

Adrienne Rich emphasizes the radical possibilities of female biology. She feels that woman's body has long been under the shackles of patriarchy which has made women powerless vis-à-vis their male counterparts. The physicality of women in Rich's view is not simply a destiny but a resource, exploiting which they can be powerful. Rich defines motherhood in two ways - firstly, "the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and children" and secondly, "the institution which aims at ensuring that the potential shall remain under male control" (Rich 13). The first part is a biological process, the second a cultural one. Men, in order to subjugate women, try to control the very nature of women's reproductive power. Rich's solution of subordination of women through patriarchal control of reproduction is to destroy completely the very institution of motherhood. This is "to release the creation and sustenance of life into the same realm of decision, struggle, surprise, imagination and conscious intelligence, as any other difficult, but
freely chosen work" (Rich 280). Rich thus attempts to demystify motherhood and bring it down to the level of any other job performed by women.

Sara Ruddick ("Maternal Thinking") again emphasizes the power of women in giving birth and her powerlessness vis-à-vis the control of reproduction. Her focus is upon 'maternal thought', i.e., how a mother prioritises preservation, growth and acceptability of the child by often compelling him/her to face harsh conditions and hardships resulting in his/her subordination which is not at all beneficial to the development of his/her overall personality. Ruddick suggests that the therapy is in putting the 'maternal thought' out from a private realm on to a public one.

The release of the potential of motherhood from private to public domain in order to negate the subordination of women to men is often associated with a negative feeling. Thus the 'joys of motherhood' (a la Emecheta) become questionable and are questioned. The assumption that women are "desperately wanting to have some man’s baby" is challenged by the assertion that in reality "women spend most of their lives planning how to avoid babies, not to have them" (Spare Rib, no. 165, 5).

Thus there is a refusal to accept the notion that women without any children or life-partner were "enigmatic at best, superfluous at worst" (Irena Klepfisz quoted in Dowrick and Grundberg 27). "The emphasis on motherhood in the ideology and culture of society at large, and within feminist debate, is frustrating to those who do not or cannot have children" (Tuula 44). The
assertion even goes to the extent of contesting the possibility of any joy in motherhood.

Juliet Mitchell is one of the psychoanalytical theorists who try to explore the psychological dimensions of motherhood, and in doing so often reverts back to Freud. Psychoanalysts serve to show how the patriarchal culture is reborn within individuals. Mitchell explores how desire, fantasy and the unconscious work towards the creation of 'divided subjectivities' and how the difference in the resolution of the Oedipal complex plays a part in the composition of masculinity and femininity in boys and girls.

Chodorow (The Reproduction of Mothering) explores how the maternal instinct in women creates the sexual division of labour upon which the distinction between the public and the private realm is made. Mothering pushes women into the private sphere allowing men to dominate over them. Chodorow questions the reason behind the daughters' inheritance of the desire and capacity to mother and the inability of the sons to do so. She emphasizes the role of the family structure to create a different psychological situation for men and women. According to the psychological viewpoint propagated by Chodorow it is because of the daughter's retention of identity with the mother and her position defined by the sex-gender system, that she inherits the capacity and desire to be a mother herself.

Segal (Is the Future Female?) criticises Chodorow for what she calls her 'psychic essentialism'. Segal is sceptic that the sexual division of labour is entirely a result of psychic orientation and points out to one of the omissions
made by Chodorow. In Segal’s opinion, men are stable not because of their personality characteristics born out of a different sort of resolution of the Oedipal complex, but because of the privilege and dominance that they enjoy in the society.

Chodorow herself criticises some of the modern feminist writers who portray an all powerful motherhood and puts the onus of success and failure of mothering totally on the mothers themselves. Arcana (Our Mother’s Daughter) and Friday (My Mother/Myself) belong to this school who put the blames on the mothers for their daughters being caught in the web of patriarchy. Rich focuses on mothers rather than on daughters to argue that ideal motherhood is an oxymoron so long there is patriarchy. Chodorow, however, emphasizes the need to leave behind the myth of ‘perfect mother’, to construct a theory of motherhood.

“But if we take seriously the conception transformational politics embedded in ‘the personal is political’, we do need to develop analyses that connect psychic structures with social structures” (Tuula 45). However, it has been difficult to provide a psychoanalytical theory for motherhood that would take into account both the psychic and social attributes. Chodorow’s theory, in spite of its shortcomings, makes an attempt to combine both the psychic and social dimensions:

The reproduction of women’s mothering is the basis for the reproduction of women’s location and responsibility in the domestic sphere. This mothering and its generalization to
women's structural location in the domestic sphere, links the contemporary social organization of gender and social organization of production and contribution to the reproduction of each (Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering 208).

But this actually brings us to what Segal calls 'maternal revivalism' that would put women back to private sphere. Segal points out that the difficulties of transformational politics have forced many women in the 1980s to move away from public struggles. But the importance of the private sphere of maternity in no way does reduce the importance of questions related to paid work, childcare and gender inequalities which need to be fought in the public politically. Segal warns that 'feminine essentialism' might mean a step backwards.

However, today's Women's Liberation Movement is not only concerned about women as part of the labour force, but also about the nature of work with the demands of personal life, especially maternity. This feeling is expressed in the works of Stephanie Dowrick who says that we should be:

Challenging a system which says that we can be a public success within it only if we are absent from our children, or if we are prepared to dismiss or diminish our need to be within them, and their needs – perhaps even their right – to be with us even more than a full working week allows (Dowrick quoted in Tuula, 46).
It is not that Segal does not care about these questions but rather she puts her emphasis on a different aspect. She points out that though women of their generation did not want to be like their mothers, they did not want to be like their fathers either. Struggling for equality in a patriarchal society and simultaneously maintaining a critique of that equality is not an easy task to pursue. The dilemma that today’s mothers face is how to reconcile between economic independence, professional success and the demands of motherhood – a dilemma which in most likelihood is to remain unresolved for some time to come.

**Motherhood and Feminist Writing:**

Contemporary feminist criticism has concentrated on the connection between feminist writing and the maternal dimension of womanhood and it is Cixous who has most emphasized on the positive and revolutionary values of such a connection. Cixous had proclaimed that “women must write through their bodies” (Cixous 886) that they must write with their “mother’s milk” (Cixous 881). Some critics like Moi and Showalter had expressed concern that such a style of writing would help reducing women to body and their works would never transcend the barrier of natural sphere and attend the status of cultural constructs.

However, Cixous dismisses any such idea and writes in a style which best exemplifies what she theorises. She declares that “woman must write woman. And man, man” (Cixous 877). She finds absurd the general critical
tendency to “hesitate to admit or deny outright the possibility of the pertinence
of a distinction between feminine and masculine writing” (Cixous 883). “The
Laugh of Medusa” goes on to acknowledge such a ‘distinction’ and then show
how such a ‘distinction’ proves problematic:

That writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting
the process of the same and of the other without which nothing
can live, undoing the work of death – to admit this is first to want
the two, as well as both, the ensemble of the one and the other,
not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion or some other
form of death, but infinitely dramatized by an incessant process
of change from one subject to another. A process of different
subjects knowing one and other and beginning one another
anew only from the living boundaries of the other: a multiple and
inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and
transformations of the same into the other and into the in-
between from which woman takes her forms (Cixous 883).

Cixous’s call for the movement ‘into the in-between’ is a textual as well
as conceptual feature of Derrida’s writing. According to Derrida, “the power of
‘repetition’ alone ... transforms an absolute idiom into a limit which is always
already transgressed” (Derrida 213). In “The Laugh of Medusa” one can
observe this transformation in progress, through the text’s process of repetition.
One example of this practice of transgressive repetition is the exploration of
the breakdown of ‘sexual opposition’. Cixous says “sexual opposition, which
has always worked for man's profit to the point of reducing writing, too, to his laws is only a historico-cultural limit" (Cixous 883). She asserts, "There is, there will be more and more rapidly pervasive now, a fiction that produces irreducible effects of femininity" (Cixous 883). Yet this is somewhat ambivalent as her pushing of the 'historico-cultural limit' of masculine writing is based on the very sexual opposition she opposes.

A second challenge posed by Cixous's writing style is her proclamation to write 'in-between' (Cixous 883) by which she means all incessant movement between opposition to and exchange with masculine style of writing. Such a movement is made possible through repetitions, slight and varying, so that the two styles are neither totally distinct, nor quite amalgamated and ever remain on a 'process of exchange and multiplicity' (Meaney 54). Her theory as well as her writing produces a chain of alternatives and opposites only to disintegrate them into multiple possibilities. "The Laugh of the Medusa" has no single, definite meaning. It is repudiation against the 'masculinist' tradition which tends to define in concrete terms and renders everything specific:

Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallocentric tradition (Cixous 879).

In Cixous's writing we find a slithering between meanings. "They riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss" (Cixous 883). It is the territory in-between that Cixous claims for 'feminine' writing.
“Cixous (re)possesses the terrifying power projected on to the feminine, returning the gaze of the other with all the power of difference in her Medusa’s head and rejoining that head with a body” (Meaney 56) who can write – “More body, hence more writing” (Cixous 886).

Cixous’s writing exhibits a constant movement between subject and object, masculine and feminine, backwards and forwards. The only thing consistent in her writing is probably her very inconsistency. This makes her writing at once difficult and vulnerable to misreading and misrepresentation.

Doris Lessing’s perception of the role of the maternal is somewhat similar to that of Cixous. In both of them we find motherhood in a “cultural and linguistic matrix (mother in language and culture, culture and language as mother) as well as biological motherhood” (Meaney 64). However, Lessing’s exposition of the relation between language and the feminine is strikingly different:

I see them as two forks of a road. The second – intense, careful, self-conscious, mannered – could have led to a style of writing usually described as ‘feminine’. The style of (the first) is straight, broad, direct: is much less beguiling, but is the highway to a kind of writing that has the freedom to develop as it likes (Lessing 9).

A connection is made between the writing style that can be called feminine and beguilement. A quest is made for a writing style that is free, direct and not feminine.
Cixous agrees that “woman has always functioned ‘within’ the discourse of man, a signifier which has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its different sounds” (Cixous 887). Her prescription for women writers is “to dislocate this ‘within’...to make it hers...to invent for herself a language to get inside of” (Cixous 887).

Unlike Cixous, Lessing refuses to put the subject into confusion and question in order to “invent for herself a language” (Meaney 76). In doing so Lessing has to create a standard outside her which can legitimize her writing thus questioning the very subject which she tries to free from doubt. “She is no longer ‘a woman’, still less a particular woman, but is objectified” (Meaney 77).

In Lessing’s fiction the attempt to unify the engulfment of differences shows the impossibility of rendering any fixed identity. In Cixous, the authority is deliberately destabilized through linguistic play and logical contradiction. As she argues: “Assertions of truth become expositions of its impossibility and attempts to assert or reject femininity in writing produce both contrary and indistinguishable results” (Meaney 77).

Cixous and Lessing represent the polarities of the feminist approaches to the subject; nevertheless, the mother/motherhood remain for both of them at the ‘heart of the matter’.
Section II: Mother Daughter Relationship

No particular theoretical premise should be adequate for understanding the mystique of any such relationship. However, several treatises in the Western feminist discourse appear relevant and illuminating in this connection. These discourses represent various trends of thought, but some of the more prominent of them try to analyse the relationship from a psychoanalytical viewpoint, drawing mostly on Freud. However, often the discussions also focus on gynocriticism, thereby looking at the women writers of the past as literary mothers. We begin our discussion with Simone de Beauvoir, whose simple yet powerful analysis of the relationship goes a long way in making us understand the ambivalent nature of the bond between the mother and the daughter.

The mother and the daughter in a familial set up:

The relation between the mother and the daughter as portrayed in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* is one of heightened dramatic intensity. The little girl is one over whom the domination of the mother seems to be complete. Whereas in the case of the little boy, the mother sees in the infant a potential hero who will conquer the world and yet remain totally under her control, in the case of the baby girl she sees her own ‘double’ (Beauvoir 532), a member not of the ‘superior’ sex but of the same status as her own, who can easily be subjugated to her wills. The relation between the mother and the daughter often acquires a hostile dimension because of the identification of
the former within the latter. Most women suffer from an ambivalent stance where they simultaneously adore and detest their sexual identity. The mother's identification with the daughter gives rise to occasions where the daughter is loved and hated at the same time. Beauvoir makes a distinction between two kinds of mothers. One group consists of women who are satisfied with their feminine state and rejoice at the prospect of reliving their lives through their daughters, while the other group includes women who look at femininity rather as a burden than bliss. The first group, according to Beauvoir, is keen to provide their daughters all the opportunities they can afford as they identify themselves totally with their daughters. They give their daughters complete independence and subjugate their own egos so that their complete interest is focussed upon their daughter's well being. Such a mother looks at her daughter as a projection of her own self and vicariously derives enjoyment in the daughter's pleasure, so much so that in giving indulgence to her daughter she becomes hard and caustic to the rest of the world. The daughter, however, often gets annoyed with the adoring mother, as the very intensity of the relation torments her. She tries to break away from such a relationship which is often oppressive, and crippling on occasions, resulting in her remaining immature all through her life. The other class of mothers, too obsessed with their misfortune as women, see in their daughter a fellow sufferer which rouses within them a sense of satisfaction, "the bitter pleasure of self-recognition in another victim" (Beauvoir 533). A mother belonging to this type, nevertheless, suffers from an
intense guilt-feeling as the giver of birth to her daughter and thus holding herself responsible for her own child's possible eventual suffering. She thus feels the remorse for her own self through her daughter, which gets manifested in various anxieties. This again leads to a powerful identification with the daughter making the latter feel considerably distressed.

The conflict between the mother and the daughter surfaces when the latter grows up and tries to assert her independence. The mothers who identify so much with the daughters are in no mood to recognise the need for freedom which the grown up girls crave for. The mothers find this act on part of the daughters to be sheer selfishness smacking of ingratitude. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it, "she (mother) cannot bear to have her double become an other" (Beauvoir 534). The dynamics of power by which a male exerts superiority over his female counterpart can work for women only in their relationship with children, especially with their daughters. Once the daughter grows up and disturbs the power equation the mother loses her privileged position. Her authority is challenged and she feels frustrated.

Beauvoir also highlights another dimension of the problematics of the relationship when the daughter – usually the eldest one – happens to be the father's pet. She is most often the one who has to do the most oppressive of the daily chores and is often abused by the mother without any apparent reason. A grown up child can often match her mother in performing household jobs and can be even better off because of her youthful vivacity. The mother's place is thus threatened by a daughter who proves to be her substitute.
The mother is especially vexed when the daughter boldly asserts herself. She does not generally like her daughter's association with her own friends whose influence she often considers to be bad. A special hatred is reserved for the ladies of her age with whom her daughter associates. The mother also expects her daughter to be serious. Any sort of levity is not tolerated. The mother is jealous of her daughter because she herself is not allowed all these joys of life. She has to sacrifice much for her daughter and the gaiety on the daughter's part makes her feel that her daughter does not care for her sufferings.

With the passing years the conflict between the mother and the daughter intensifies. As the daughter grows up the mother sees all her personal hopes being dashed. The first menstruation of the daughter is often hated as the daughter now becomes a real woman. The mother now realises that the future holds immense potentialities for her daughter which has been lost to her for ever. The mother may begin to hate her daughter at this point and make deliberate attempts to curb her daughter's freedom. Generally, the daughter emerges as the winner, but the conflict nevertheless extracts its pound of flesh from her. Throughout her life she must suffer from a guilt feeling, a feeling which originates from her having hurt the person with whom she was mostly identified. She cannot but be a rebel against her mother, but it makes her full of remorse and anguish. Once the daughter grows up fully, the relationship becomes much easier but the scars of the earlier skirmishes must be borne throughout the life. As Beauvoir points out, "But the one (mother)
remains for ever disappointed and frustrated; the other (daughter) will often believe that she is under a curse" (Beauvoir 536).

If Beauvoir concentrates on the process of identification between the mother and the daughter and the resultant complexities, the psychoanalysts focus on the sexual orientation in order to look into the complexities of the mother daughter relationship.

The psychodynamics of mother daughter relationship:

Psychoanalytic studies on the heterosexual erotic orientation in both the sexes can be used to shed light on the complexities involved in the mother-daughter relationship. The ambivalences in such a relationship where the mother and the daughter both love and hate each other are deep rooted; the mutual acceptance and rejection can be traced back to the growing up process of the girls. As the process is different from the one experienced by the boys, the girls undergo a relationship with their mothers, which is unique to them.

From the psychoanalytical perspective the heterosexual behaviour in both boys and girls is an outgrowth of oedipal complexities. "In males the path of this development is straightforward, and the advance from 'phallic' phase does not take place in consequence of a complicated 'wave of repression' but is based upon a ratification of that which already exists..." (Deutsch, “The Psychology of Woman” 165). The attachment to mother is repressed and a more permanent relationship with a mother like figure is made.
But the development of female sexuality is not so 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, "The Psychology of Woman" 165). As an infant the girl child develops its primary relationship first with her mother which is then transformed to her father and latter to other men. This implies that the Oedipus complex in females is not only different from the males but also is much more complex.

At the outset, the mother is the primary love object for girls. Their relationship with their fathers develops only as a reaction to their relationship to their mothers. This new relationship competes with the pre-Oedipal tie that a daughter experiences with her mother. Though the father is also brought under the ambit of being a primary love object, this does not happen at the cost of the mother. The initial relationship with the mother is retained and a new relationship is developed with the father, thus building Oedipal attachments with both the parents.

The behavioural pattern of the parents is also responsible in affecting these relationships. As compared to the mothers, fathers are less available physically, more distant emotionally and are usually not the primary caretakers. As a result, the girl never severs her original narcissistic tie with her mother, and the attachment towards her father evolves as an additional development. This results in a complexity as the mother and the father become the girl's primary love object by turn.
The complexity is the result of a non-linear way of growth of heterosexuality in a girl. For males, the erotic tie and emotional dependence both converge on a woman. But for women the attachment with men is primarily erotic, they depend on other women for their emotional sustenance. Deutsch points out that women experience heterosexual relationship in a triangular context and men are not exclusive objects for them.

This probing into the child's psychology helps us to understand the ambivalences that are involved in a mother-daughter relationship to some extent. For the boys the mother remains the only primary love object, but not so in the case of girls. They seem to switch their primary attention in between the two parents. Naturally, the relationship established with the mother is quite problematic. The mother becomes the most intimate figure for the girls at some points of time, whereas at other moments she turns into a remote figure for her daughter making the relationship enigmatic.

The daughter's relationship with her two parents varies qualitatively because of the difference in intensity in such relationships. Initially, the girl child cannot distinguish between her self and the social world and considers her mother as her own expansion. The mother is sometimes perceived as a narcissistic threat to the girl as the intensity of the relationship often engulfs the identity of the daughter; at other times she is regarded as the provider of the basic narcissistic unity. The father, with whom the relationship never reaches such intense dimensions, remains by comparison a much more distant figure. The daughter's oedipal love for her mother is both a threat to
her own selfhood and a bliss promising of primal unity. The ambivalent love-hate relationship that a daughter experiences with her mother is thus explained.

Psychoanalytical studies show that this love-hate relationship between the mother and the daughter is also manifested in the adult sexual behaviour. According to Michael Balint, the primary psychological goal of adult sexual relationship is to reach a state of infantile union, in which everything is perfect and happy. This implies that one wants to be loved and cared for as wholly as possible without any attempt on one's own. In Balint’s view, men are more adept in reaching an infantile state than women because during a sexual relationship a man can relive his infantile experiences with his mother. The man can effectively play the role of the child, who is loved unasked.

But the women can never relive their experiences with their mothers during a sexual intercourse. So their reaction is entirely different. Either she must identify with a man who has the capacity to enjoy primal unity, thus negating her own mother; or she must identify herself with her mother with whom she experienced such unity. This anomaly that a woman experiences during her sexual union explains the ambivalences of her relationship with her own mother.

The oedipal experiences in the boys and the girls differ considerably. Women situate themselves in a relational triangle; so a heterosexual relationship for them is not exclusive. The men's difficulty in providing
emotional nurturance further forces a woman to look elsewhere for emotional support. This is often achieved by developing a deep personal relationship with other women. Deutsch points out, that whereas some women look out for other women rivals in making their relationship with their men a success others need female confidants. These relationships all recreate the mother-daughter bondage, which is also often discovered in lesbian ties.

But as the social system makes it intensely difficult for women to look for support outside the family, they look more and more towards their children to fulfil their relational needs. The woman in her adulthood enters a heterosexual relationship with her male partner but needs another relationship to fulfil the relational triangle which she experienced as a child. So a woman looks forward to her child and places them in this situation of relational triangle. For a man, who is habituated in a linear relationship with women since his infancy, the child may be a hindrance to his relationship with his partner. But for the woman, it is only the child who completes the relational triangle.

The child also helps in recreating in the woman her own infantile experiences which she is unable to enjoy in a heterosexual relationship. The mother-child relationship develops as the primary union for women, which for men are achieved in a heterosexual situation. In motherhood, a woman thus recreates her original experiences as an infant. She now identifies herself with her mother, whereas, the child is situated in her place. This implies identification with the mother on the one hand and a projection of the self into the child.
The need for women to recreate a pre-oedipal primary bond makes them capable for mothering. But they themselves are often in conflict with the internal mothers lurking within them or their real mothers. The ability to form a primary union, the capacity to identify themselves with their mothers - which make them fit for motherhood – may also make them more empathetic curbing their rational senses. Again, the absence of a relationship with other women or father/husband may lead to an absolute dependence on the primary relationship with the infant. Chodorow rightly points out:

Though women come to mother, and to be mothers, the very capacities and commitments for mothering can be in contradiction one with the other and within themselves. Capabilities which enable mothering are also precisely those which can make mothering problematic. (Chodorow, “The Psychodynamics of Family” 164)

Redefining the Medusa myth:

The complexity of the mother daughter relationship also finds expression in the mythical realm and modern psychosexual interpretation of such myths. The Medusa myth turns out to be at the heart of such critical discourses.

The mother-daughter relationship is often the key to feminine identity. While some interpret the relationship as problematic, threatening, enigmatic, of ‘nightmarish intensity’ (Meaney 16), others find the relationship to be
nourishing, 'life affirming' (Meaney 16). These two diametrically opposite views find expression in Lessing's *Landlocked* and Cixous's "The Laugh of Medusa" and Gerardine Meaney considers them with reference to the various interpretations of the Medusa myth. In both Lessing and Cixous the mother figure is an engulfing one.

Lessing portrays "the overbearing, clutchy 'mother'" (Cixous 880), "the accomplice to a sociality" (Cixous 888). The mother is seen not only in an essentially negative feminine role but also as an agent trying to conform such a role on her daughter. She "symbolizes the paralyzing force of the family, in its structuration of personality and limitation of potential" (Meaney 17).

In this sense the mother figure conforms to the patriarchal ideology of feminine identity as defined by Freud in terms of castration and penis envy. The woman is thus reduced to a position of 'not-man', denying any kind of feminine difference. Such a translation of woman into negative qualities not only makes her sexually inferior but also morally vulnerable.

To dislodge this patriarchal definition of womanhood it is essential to redefine the feminine identity and the mother-daughter relationship becomes "crucial to the cultural definition of femininity and to feminism's attempt to redefine womanhood" (Meaney 21). However the intensity of such a relationship often seems to be destructive, too painfully intense. The mother and the daughter are entangled in such a way that they must endure the ordeal of rejection, self-denial, cruelty. This is an invincible deterministic force
where succeeding generations of women find themselves lost to their mothers and daughters.

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

Both the mother and daughter are agents of society and family, none having the power to change. They play mutually hostile roles. The daughter shows revulsion against the mother. But their voices are interchangeable. They occupy the same space and there is a positive interplay between them. But at the same time they suffer from an anguish arising out of their identity crisis: “Of the two of us, who was the one, who was the other?” (Irigaray, “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other” 63). The mother epitomizes the paralytic forces of the society and the daughter in her turn becomes both an agent and a victim of such forces.

In extreme cases “horror of motherhood and horror of the mother” (Meaney 23) dwell together. The mother appears to be a ‘phallic mother’, a ‘castrated one’ (Freud Complete Psychological Works Vol. 22, 126). The infantile fear of the mother overpowers the attachment to the mother, as the mother appears in the daughter’s mind as a castrator, as a destroyer of her
phallic power. The hatred for the mother is not only against the primary love object but also against the parent with whom the daughter must identify. This results in the daughter's anti-narcissism. In turn the daughter becomes a mother and begins to hate her daughter as she is so much like her.

The Medusa myth which has been central to the idea of 'maternal' in Western discourse has been variously interpreted. Joseph Campbell sees in Medusa a 'Great Mother' (Campbell 153); she is "the womb and tomb of the world: the primal, one and only ultimate reality of nature" (Campbell 25-6). According to him, the more the power of the mother is feared and repelled more certain is the recurrence of the nightmare in the form of the offspring. The 'Great Mother' "is there to be dealt with all the time and more sternly she is cut down, the more frightening her Gorgoneum be" (Campbell 153). Laing represents the myth in a different way. Instead of the fear of the female and mother, he connects any kind of fear ('petrification') experienced by the schizophrenic to the myth of Medusa. In Laing's interpretation it is Persues, the slainer of Medusa, who is the agent and Medusa only a potential instrument: "Petrification, we remember, was one of Persues's means of killing his enemies. By means of the eyes of Medusa's head he turned them into stones" (Laing 79). For the women the fear of engulfment and petrification translates into the fear of the mother as well as the fear of motherhood.

Freud's interpretation of the myth is different as he is ready to deal only with Medusa's decapitated head after it has been worn by Athene: "This symbol of horror is worn upon her by the virgin goddess, Athene. And rightly
so, for thus she becomes a woman who is unapproachable, and repels all sexual desires since she displays the terrifying genitals of the mother” (Freud Complete Psychological Works Vol. 18, 273-4). The myth dramatizes the female struggle to escape the assimilation of the simultaneous death of Medusa and appropriation of her powers by her daughter.

Controlling of the image of Medusa helps Perseus to accumulate her power. Earlier Medusa could kill others by seeing; now she causes death only when seen. She becomes an instrument and Persues “seizes the power of representation” (Meaney 32). Thus the woman is represented and controlled. The mirror image is “the false woman that prevents the live one from breathing” (Cixous 880).

Cixous proclaims a more positive interpretation of the mother-daughter relationship and the maternal and considers it central to the women’s repossession of body, voice, writing and power. Instead of the terrible anguish and anti-love arising out of loss of identity Cixous asserts:

There is hidden and always ready in woman the source; the locus for the other. The mother too is a metaphor. It is necessary and sufficient for that the best of herself be given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was ‘born’ to her. (Cixous 881)

Motherhood in Cixous is reassuring: “In women there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything alright, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation” (Cixous 882). The fear of repetition with each child
birth is absent in Cixous: “If there’s a risk there’s not an inevitable trap” (Cixous 890).

Cixous explodes the myth of the screening hero who overcomes Medusa by controlling her reflection by looking at her indirectly. Instead of being bound “to a narrow and round of uncreative or repetitious duties” (de Beauvoir 63, translator’s note), but released “into infinity” (Cixous 889), “the moving open transitional space” where she “dares for the other, wants the other” (Cixous 893), she can explore new territories without annihilating herself. “You have only to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she is not deadly. She’s beautiful and she is laughing” (Cixous 885).

Denying the mother for Cixous is equivalent to denying the self. The quest for escape from the mother is not the escape from any painful anguish but from “the wonder of being several”, “the gift of alterability”, “the erotogenity of the heterogeneous” (Cixous 889) which together constitute femininity.

Resurrecting the literary/cultural mother:

Besides the psychoanalysts, the gynocritics have also expressed their opinions on the mother daughter relationship. Their approach differs from the other school of critics since they tend to look at such a relationship from the cultural viewpoint identifying and celebrating the cultural mother figures.

Alice Walker’s article “In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens” is a quest for the black women’s artistic tradition. In doing so Walker refers to the poet Jean Toomer who found the black women of the 1920s in possession of a rich inner
life, of elevated spirituality of which they themselves were unaware. These women suffered so much pain in their lives that they turned their mutilated, maimed bodies into something selfless, so much so that instead of making them 'sexual objects' their bodies turned them into 'saints'. Some of them became crazy or lunatic while others slipped out of the world quietly, but could hardly leave any mark.

They are the mothers and grandmothers of the women of the present generations. Toomer found them to be "exquisite butterflies trapped in an evil honey" who were regarded as "the mule of the world" (Walker 178). The rich inner life of these women never found any expression outside because of the external subjugations. But these did not stop them from dreaming or having visions, singing lullabies, making charcoal drawings – the significance of which was even unknown to them. They could detach their minds from their suffering bodies to the tunes of the songs not yet written, rhythms of dances not yet composed.

These mothers and grandmothers waited to give expression to their artistic pursuits, but understood in a faint, vague way that such a day would only usher in long after they were gone. In the meantime they could only enter into loveless marriages, unresisted prostitution and unfulfilled child-rearing.

Walker finds them to be Artists, Creators and hence rich in inner spirituality. So they went totally numb, spurned by their creativity which they could not express. The rich inner spirituality which turned them into Creators bled them internally, turning them insane, since there was no release for their
creative spirits. Some of them shaved off their spirituality to unburden themselves so that they could bear to live a life of spiritual waste which their sexually abused, battered bodies compelled them to do.

The black prostitute or slave grandmother has a heart rendering story to tell. The artist in her was cruelly suppressed since she did not even possess her own body. So instead of painting or sculpting she had to slave in the cotton fields or bear children one after another. The agony of the black artist who had to die with all her gifts subdued within her becomes easily comprehensible. Alice Walker questions what exactly has kept alive the black women’s artistic tradition and enters into a quest of the identity of black American women.

Walker gives an example of one of the literary mothers – Phillis Wheatley, a slave in the 1700s. She was a sickly woman finally driven into penniless freedom who was not even in possession of her own body. Walker quotes from Virginia Woolf’s “A Room of One’s Own” (with her own alterations/additions)

any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century [insert ‘eighteenth century’, insert ‘black woman’, insert ‘born or made a slave’] would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard [insert ‘saint’], feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill and psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted
and hindered by contrary instincts [add 'chains, guns, the lash, the ownership of one's body by someone else, submission to an alien religion'], that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty (Walker 179-80).

According to Walker in Phillis's case the key words are 'contrary instincts'. Slavery meant for Phillis not only the subjugation of her body also alienation from her tradition. Naturally, she often voiced her subjugators' words, without realizing the deep irony underneath. Hence, liberty which she never enjoyed comes in her poetry in the image of a Goddess, her white mistress whom she served. This has obviously raised questions about Phillis's sincerity in a politically correct world. Walker emphasizes that Phillis is to be regarded as a literary mother not because of what she sang, but because she sang at all.

Black women have always been regarded as the 'mules' of the world. Walker exhorts to look at the identity of the black woman, and this she believes will lead to personal accounts of stories yet untold, stories of one's mothers and grandmothers. This is necessary because these women of yesteryears were spiritually intense, though they themselves were unaware of it.

The life of an ordinary black woman of the earlier generations would show that they worked from sunrise to late night, without any respite, doing household chores, looking after the children, working in the fields along with men folk. So the question that comes to one's mind is when does such an
overworked mother let loose her creative spirit? Walker says that the answer has baffled us simply because it is so simple. It has eluded us because we have searched for high art forgetting the lower edifices. Walker draws attention to a quilt in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., a unique creation made of "bits and pieces of worthless rags" but, "obviously the work of a person of powerful imagination and deep spiritual feeling" (Walker 182). The quilt is the work of "an anonymous Black woman in Alabama, a hundred years ago" (Walker 182).

The challenge for us is to discover this anonymous creator who would turn out to be one of the mothers of the black 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).5

This has been the case with numerous 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 that the today's woman writes, are actually songs and stories of yesteryears, of their mothers and grandmothers. Not only the content similar to the ones narrated by the earlier women the manner is also greatly influenced by them.

Walker narrates about her own mother, who laboured in the households and cotton fields and yet was a great artist to whom stories came "as naturally as breathing" (Walker 183). But it is not as a narrator, but as gardener that she gave vent to her true creative genius. She turned every barren land into a
beautiful garden, vibrant with colours, lively and magnificent, original and joyous. It is as a grower of flowers she became most absorbed, most 'radiant' (Walker 183). It is in this work she became a true Creator managing her little world to make it a thing of amazing beauty.

Her face, as she prepares the Art that is her gift, is a legacy of respect she leaves to me, for all that illuminates and cherishes life. She has handed down respect for the possibilities – and the will to grasp them.

For her, so hindered and intruded upon in so many ways, being an artist has still been a daily part of her life. This ability to hold on, even in very simple ways, is work black women have done for a very long time (Walker 183).

Walker concludes "Guided by my heritage of a love of beauty and respect for strength – in search of my mother's garden, I found my own" (Walker 183).

She dreams of other mothers and grandmothers, somewhere in Africa, who painted with the most vivacious colours, sang in the most melodious voices, wove most fascinating mattresses, and told most astounding stories. Theirs is the tradition to whom the black woman artist of today owes her allegiance and power of expression.

Alice Walker's essay – though it concentrates on the black women artists and their tradition – is, however, a document which shades light on every woman artist. Women, who were subjugated in every society, were never allowed to vent their creative feelings. But their creativity flowed underneath; it
never found any concrete expression but nurtured future generations of women artists. Though woman’s art never finds any place in the high edifices of traditional artistic canon, a tradition entirely women’s own has survived in almost every society. It is from this tradition that the present women artists must draw upon and derive inspiration.

From this study of the representative critical approaches vis-à-vis the mother daughter relationship two significant trends seem to emerge: firstly, the mother daughter relationship is a complex, ambivalent process where the mother and the daughter figures appear simultaneously to love and hate each other and secondly, there has been an urgency on the writer-daughter’s part to appreciate and resurrect her literary mother. However, there can be subtle variations to the general approach, depending on the varying socio-cultural spaces which provide the immediate context of such a relationship. My endeavour in the next chapter will be to look into the condition of women in the Indian context from a socio-historical point of view and try to decipher how the prevailing situation influences the portraiture of mother daughter relationships in Indian literary scenario today.

Notes:

1. This is particularly true in the Indian context where the birth of a progeny, especially a male one, is often considered the be all and end all of a woman's life.
2. Anita Desai makes an interesting use of the dilemma, where the mother is simultaneously eager for and dreads the birth of her child, in her novel *Where shall we Go this Summer?*

3. The concept of ‘joys of motherhood’ is also challenged by other critical voices, who often emphasise the violence that is common in mother-child relationship [Rich (*Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*), Chodorow (“The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother”), Lazare (*The Mother Knot*).]

4. In Greek mythology Medusa was one of the three Gorgons, monstrous females with writhing serpents for her hair. Anyone who looked directly at her was turned into stone. Medusa was eventually killed by hero Perseus, the son of Zeus, and a mortal woman, Danae.

5. Walker’s words seem to be true for every culture. In Bengal, for example, women have traditionally given expression to their creative bend of mind through *kānthā* (quilt), *bādi* (a preparation made out of paste of pulses, often designed in the shape of ornaments) and *ālpanā* (geometrical designs made using a paste of rice for religious occasions).