Chapter 4

Distant Relations:
Close Bonds
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It is interesting to note the variety and range of relationships in which the mother and daughter have been envisioned by their authors in the *fin de siècle* Indian novels which constitutes the focus of the present study. Even a random selection from the novels of one decade, the last one of the millennium illustrates the fascinating spectrum. The present discussion proposes to study a selective list of the same with the view to understand the respective authors' handling of the problematics of the relationship, its ordeals and rewards.

In this chapter I intend to focus on those mother-daughter relationships which stand out for extreme amicability. These relationships sometimes reflect a profound, mutual understanding between the mother and the daughter figures, whereas in other cases, the relationships never reach the intense emotional level so as to stir any real hostility. However, in all these relationships one thing stands out – none of these bondings takes shape between close relations. Of the nine relationships discussed in the following sections, only two are between biological mothers and daughters. Even these two relationships are distant in a way since in one case the mother flees leaving her daughter when the latter is only a child, whereas in another case the girl-child is already dead. These two relationships are therefore not so much between mothers and daughters but about memories of a lost mother and a lost daughter respectively. The other relationships involve somewhat distant figures like grandmother, aunt, step mother-in-law, teacher, neighbour and even an aged household maid. Though the close familial set up prevalent in the Indian society allows some of these distant figures to establish a
sort of surrogate filial relationship akin to the maternal type, there is nevertheless
an essential distance that makes these relationships less constricting.

Section I: Gods, Graves and Grandmother

Namita Gokhale's novel, Gods, Graves and Grandmother (1994) is an
apparently improbable rags to riches story. The protagonist Gudiya\textsuperscript{1} survives the
hard life of penury along with her grandmother to be eventually provided with a
decent upbringing as well as a fair share of wealth. Gudiya, who is even deserted
by her mother, would have been a destitute had not her grandmother\textsuperscript{2}, with her
superb cunning and practical wisdom, saved her from such a misfortune.

Gudiya's credentials are not very 'decent' by conventional social standard to
begin with. Daughter of a kothiwali, she lived along with her mother, grandmother
and her grandmother's younger brother in a large haveli boasting of one hundred
and thirty rooms and twenty two servants (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and
Grandmother 4). Her mother, a noted singer famed for her beauty, followed the
footsteps of her more illustrious mother to perfection. Then tragedy strikes upon
the happy quartet. The younger brother of Gudiya's grandmother, who is kept
protected from the vices of the kothi in a separate wing of the haveli, commits
suicide, the chief patron of her mother dies and the police get suspicious. The
consumers stop flocking the household; the police, bailiffs, lawyers, pawn-
brokers; now fill their place. Gudiya's mother's attempt to elope with her
harmonium player proves abortive as the man flees with all her jewellery. An
ongoing court-case is decided in favour of the wife of the deceased patron and
the haveli is lost. Gudiya's mother, unable to cope with the misfortune, begins to lose her hair and no treatment can help hide her baldness. She is no longer good for the trade. The three come to Delhi to try their luck and here Gudiya's mother elopes once again with a beggar, Riyasuddin Rizvi, this time for good. When we meet Gudiya, her mother has already deserted her leaving her to the old woman and her newly acquired misfortune.

Gudiya and her Mother:

It is almost a miracle that Gudiya, who lost her mother so early, comes close to three motherly figures in her life. Her grandmother who brings her up is almost a mother to her. Though the lady grows a little eccentric towards the end and remains preoccupied in playing the role of the great deceiver, she nevertheless, looks after her grand-daughter with utmost care and affection. The other two women, though not related to her, take an active interest in Gudiya and help her grow up into what they consider ideal for her. The first is Phoolwati, the wife of murdered Shambhu, who runs a tea-shop and other business assortments by the side of the temple complex that was Gudiya's grandmother's creation. Indebted to the old lady, Phoolwati pays her obligations back to the old lady by taking care of Gudiya and raising her like her own daughter when the 'pious' lady attains her 'samadhi'. The other lady vying to play the role of mother to Gudiya is Roxanne Lamba, the Principal of "St. Jude's Academy for the Socially Handicapped". She takes an active interest in Gudiya's life, so much so that she often comes into conflict with Phoolwati over matters relating to Gudiya.
However, even with the presence of all these ladies who cared and cajoled 'Gudiyarani', she can never forget her mother whose absence seems to be a lasting presence in her life. She is obsessed by the memory of her mother and dreams to be like her one day. Gudiya's infatuation for her mother may be explained by Lacan's concept of the 'mirror' stage. By looking at the mirror and then to other persons, especially the mother the child gets a sense of being an integrated person. So long the child only has a fragmented vision of its own self. This movement from insufficiency to anticipation is however, heavily dependent on the presence of the mother with whom the child discovers its own similarity. Gudiya seems to revert back to the mirror stage, where she must be assured by her mother's image to have a distinct identity of her own.

At the very start, Gudiya's narration registers the loss of her mother: "When my mother went away, my grandmother and I were left to fend for ourselves" (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 1). Though she seems to speak casually, the fact remains that she cannot forget; her mother's elopement with Riyasuddin seems to have cast a lasting effect on Gudiya. Indeed, the event has been a watershed in her life – divided it into two broad divisions – the time before her mother's desertion and the time after. So narrating about the golden days of the past, when they were enormously rich, Gudiya recalls: "But to begin at the beginning. Before mother left, in a long-ago time, we had been very rich" (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 4). The past is thus continuously associated with her mother's memory, resplendent with the aura of a mellow lustfulness which we find Gudiya to be craving for. So instead of being bitter
towards her mother for her refusal to perform maternal duties, Gudiya is actually teased and allured towards the sensuous world which her mother represents. On the fateful night when Saboo murders Sambhu, the tea-stall owner, because of Sambhu's affair with his wife Magoo, Gudiya sees the ghouls and evil spirits in the Peepal tree, which grew right above their shelter.

High on the upper branches I could glimpse Shambhu and Magoo, naked, hidden by the leaves, leering at me as they performed obscene and unspeakable acts. I tried to close my eyes, but they were closed already and I could not shut out the vision. And then again, in those branches, suspended against gravity, I saw my sad beautiful mother, and she too was naked and she too was enjoined in the unspeakable act with Riyasuddin the beggar (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 17).

The same vision haunts Gudiya night after night. As she is lulled to sleep by the seductive song of the Peepal tree she has a glimpse of the two pairs of lovers performing their share of energetic acrobatics. Gudiya, who has never ever been really cared for by her mother, has a strange longing for her mother. This longing again, has been subtly related to her budding adolescent sexuality. Longing for the lost mother gets merged into a narcissism which was dormant till the other day, but was now beginning to stir within. So when the grandmother points out to her “Your hair is almost the same colour as hers,” her joy knows no bound. “I shuddered in delicious anticipation; there was nothing I wanted more than to be like my wicked waylaid mother” (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and
Michael Balint observes that sexual orientation demands that a woman should either identify herself completely with her partner, thereby bypassing her mother altogether, or must connect to her mother so that she herself can be the mother to the man she loves (Balint 141). Though Gudiya’s sexual maturity had not yet come her behaviour suggests that her obsession for her mother is in a way linked to her newly stirring sexual impulse as well. There seems to be no doubt in Gudiya’s mind about her mother’s decrepit nature as she herself calls her mother ‘wicked,’ ‘waylaid.’ Apparently, she always identifies her mother as a strange sexual-object. After the death of her ammi, Gudiya has a strange vision of her where her grandmother appears to console and comfort her. In the dream-vision her grandmother appears as a celestial being, while her mother seems to be one of the extras performing a dance number on the background. Later, Kalki, Gudiya’s husband, who goes to Bombay to be a film-star, is also supposed to appear as an extra during a filmi dance. This seems to confirm the view that to Gudiya, her mother and her husband, are identical in some respect – both being manifestations of her sexual self.

Gudiya’s affair with Kalki is in a sense the replication of her mother’s elopement. She falls in love with the boy at first sight. Her mother’s daring nature is reflected in her as she takes a horse ride with him even without having an inkling of idea about the boy. Panditji, the temple purohit, Sundar, the local don, and Phoolwati, her mentor, are all against this rash decision of Gudiya. But she remains adamant and joins Kalki, the tambourine player in Shiv Mohan Band, to a marriage party where her lover conveniently deflowers her. Having his desire
gratified, Kalki is no more interested in the girl and it is only the timely interference of Phoolwati and Sundar which compels him to marry Gudiya. By behaving in such a manner, Gudiya is in fact trying to imitate her mother who has also been similarly reckless all through her life.

Gudiya's wistful longing for her mother, however, goes no further than being able to experience and thus replicate the sensuality which her mother so unabashedly enjoyed. Her admiration for her mother is for her famed beauty and for her spirit of adventurism which she believes can come in good stead in her own life. But she does not have an emotional bondage with her mother. Perhaps this explains her ambivalence; while she longs for her, she does not want to meet her. When she travels the streets of Delhi she dreads facing two familiar faces that might emerge from the footpaths. She is simultaneously fascinated and scared, drawn and repelled by the 'other' woman, but has never been able to erase her from the mirror.

Gudiya and her Grandmother:

Gudiya's relationship with her grandmother attains a different depth and dimension. Though her grandmother was once in the same profession as her mother was, Gudiya never envisions her in terms of sexuality. The relationship between the old lady and the small girl blossoms after they arrive at Delhi and Gudiya's mother runs away with Riyasuddin. The grandmother, who was a most pragmatic person, realizes the need for camouflage in order to survive the rigours of life. She assumes the identity of a Brahmin lady and contrives to start a
large temple complex which eventually she builds. The initial days with
grandmother are full of fond memories for Gudiya. She marvels in fear at the
large Peepal tree under which they had taken shelter. She is sure that there are
ghosts and ghouls in the tree. So is the belief of her grandmother as well. She
warns Gudiya never to yawn or open her mouth under the Peepal tree without
first snapping the fingers to scare the phantoms away. But she also makes
Gudiya feel reassured by pointing that these ghosts were actually familiar people
and were helping them to cope with the situation. Gudiya is relaxed with her
grandmother. She not only feeds and clothes her but also helps the young girl to
get over her childhood fears and fantasies.

Her grandmother's achievement is a source of wonder and amusement to
Gudiya. She remembers grandmother facing Sundar Pahalwan for the first time.
She cajoles him into believing that she is a pious Brahmin lady and manages a
week's time to settle the *hafta*. When Sundar arrives after a week the temple is
already there and it is the local don who has to pay his deference to the lady.
Gudiya learns from her grandmother to adapt to different situations. Stunned by
the Hindu *bhajans* that *ammi* now sang she enquired how she managed them
and learnt that it was *ammi*'s mother in turn who had taught her these *bhajans*.
The old woman had discarded her Hindu identity as it was more profitable to be a
Muslim those days. *Ammi* here does exactly the opposite, again for survival.
Gudiya is to follow the footsteps of her grandmother when later in the course of
the novel she decides to put on her own identity and become Puja Abhimanyu
Singh, a name she happens to like.
The moments she spent with her grandmother in her childhood seem to be firmly etched in Gudiya's memory. She remembers how her ammi used to tie her hair and extract the nits and complain about her missing mother:

"Your no-good mother ran off to have fun!" she would mutter, "after all, bringing up a young girl is no Gudiya-ka-khel" (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 13).

Gudiya fondly remembers how her grandmother never consented to buy a doll for her.

Although she indulged me in every other way, this was a matter about which grandmother was strangely adamant. "Chhi chhi chhil" she would expostulate, "What would you do with a golden-haired doll? You're a good girl!" (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 13)

Gudiya does not realize the reason behind this attempt to dissuade her and feels, "Perhaps she considered it somehow idolatrous" (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 13). But probably it is something other than religion that guides the grandmother. In spite of her love for Gudiya she considers the child a problem. As she grows older this feeling grows in her mind. She, therefore, would not give Gudiya anything that can be regarded to be a substitute for a child.

Events take place thick and fast. Shambhu, the tea-stall owner, falls in love with Magoo, the wife of labourer Saboo. The passion soon ends in bloodshed as the estranged husband, fuelled by the intoxicating effects of Mahua, kills both of them. Grandmother following Saboo discovers a bagful of gold coins
dating back to the reign of Emperor Jehangir. The police arrest her in connection
with the murder but she is released for her religious connections. Her arrest
makes the temple even more popular and soon she is too busy to find time for
Gudiya. She begins to withdraw into a shell of her own.

A luminous peace began to float like a cloud over her,
distancing her from me. I learnt to stand on my own feet, and even
began to look after grandmother in a fumbling uncertain way.... I
noticed that Ammi's mouth would often fall slackly in a way that
looked stupid, even senile. Yet the expression in her cataract-
clouded eyes was rapt and beatific. Soon she began ignoring me
altogether, concentrating solely on her prayer-beads, or else
singing hymns and bhajans in a startlingly strong and youthful voice
(Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 22).

The change in the old woman baffles and perturbs the child. Having only
her grandmother for her support she had come to depend on her heavily. She
could understand grandmother's fizzling with the gods and goddesses as a
means of survival, but a serious religious bent in her ammi's mind is not what she
had expected to encounter.

As for me, my grandmother's neglect hurt me deeply. I felt
fundamentally betrayed, and was actually jealous of those
impostors, those new-found gods and goddesses who had stolen
my grandmother from me. I conscientiously committed acts of
minor sacrilege, forever looking for newer and more ingenious ways
of provoking their holier-than-me presences to declare their rivalry

(Gokhale, *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* 22-23).

One of Gudiya’s last memories of enjoying a moment with her grandmother is associated with the event of an inauspicious eclipse. Following the dicta of two of her most prominent devotees, Lila and Phoolwati, grandmother obligingly asks the devotees not to venture out during the eclipse. She is unusually relaxed that night and was her old happy self. As darkness enveloped the surroundings she stepped out. When Gudiya warns her she dismisses her fears saying that it is only on such a night she can venture out without being pestered by her followers. Gudiya too steps out along with her grandmother. Her *amma* tells her of her one-time dream of becoming a film-star and her wonder at the new-found-status of a holy woman. For Gudiya the moment was too precious to let it go.

She was turning pensive again, and I was afraid that the renewed intimacy between us might suddenly snap. I looked up at the moon. The faintest suspicion of a shadow was beginning to crawl about its surface – a tiny black spot that grew bigger and bigger. The birds were getting more excited every second, and their shrill ear-splitting cacophony made it impossible to even hear what Ammi was saying.

I couldn’t read the expression on her face. Tentatively, I touched her cheek. She continued to stroke my hair (Gokhale, *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* 41).
This was one rare moment of 'renewed intimacy'. However, henceforth Gudiya's relationship with her grandmother becomes increasingly more complex and difficult. Gudiya in her early teens finds it more difficult to cope without the support of her grandmother. She has to deal with her confusions, turmoil in her mind and body all by herself. She suffers from the alienation:

Grandmother's increasing abstraction, her detachment, her inexplicable remoteness had affected me much more than I betrayed (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 43).

The rudest shock that she receives from her grandmother immediately follows the trauma of her first menstruation. Seeing the blood she thinks herself to be injured and approaches ammi for help. The stinging slap that she receives from her grandmother was probably beyond her wildest imagination.

"Nothing but trouble," grandmother gabbled, for her teeth had begun to foil her, "this girl is good for nothing but trouble from now." A look of pure virulent hatred crossed her face. She looked like a wicked old witch, and I hated her passionately and with all my heart (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 43).

For Gudiya, who had no idea of what womanhood involved, this comes as a shock. The lady she has depended upon all through her life is no longer interested in her and considers her to be nothing short of 'trouble'. Already confused and troubled, the event widens an already existing breach with her grandmother. It is only with Phoolwati's help that Gudiya manages with her new found adulthood. As for the old woman, she is already over-burdened by the
compulsions of posing as a holy woman. She has ever looked after her
granddaughter since she was a child. But now that she is grown up ammi feels
the pressure of the extra burden on her shoulders. Her experience with her
daughter has left her with a deep sense of resentment. If her daughter could
leave her own little daughter for her pleasure so could Gudiya. Ammi's past
makes her fear her future. Besides she is already aged and has become
religiously inclined. Gudiya's puberty can only usher more problems for her and
draw her back to the mundane affairs which she now wants to avoid.

However, Gudiya cannot muse on her resentment towards her
grandmother for long. On the day of Good Friday her ammi passes away leaving
her alone in the world.

On Good Friday, the day I had been scheduled to leave for
Simla, grandmother died. I found her lying in bed in an unnatural
position....

I had never seen a dead person before, yet even without
touching her or feeling her pulse I knew that she was indeed dead,
that the unknown assailant was Lord Yama.

I could not understand what she was pleading for, why she
had that beseeching look on her face. It made me pity her, it started
up all the strangulated suppressed love I bore her. My Ammi was
all I had. I had been secure in her immortality (Gokhale, Gods,
Graves and Grandmother 58).
The death of ammi marks a significant change in Gudiya's life. One can even mark the end of her childhood at this point. After the death of her grandmother, Gudiya becomes all alone. Obviously, Phoolwati, Sundar, Roxanne all act as her guardian henceforth; but she is much more independent from this point forward.

In spite of the changes that crept in with senility ammi was much more a mother to Gudiya than a grandmother. It is her care which helped Gudiya grow up. The warmth in the relationship is reciprocated by Gudiya as well. As her grandmother grows old she in her own uncertain ways begins to look after her. Her grief at the death of her ammi brings out the mutual affection that they had for each other. Even after her death the grandmother comes back to Gudiya in her dreams consoling her that she would always be by her side. When a statue of grandmother is unveiled in the temple complex and Gudiya is asked to garland her ammi she cannot hold back her tears. Though her ammi is long dead to others to Gudiya her memory remains afresh.

**Gudiya – Phoolwati:**

The death of ammi marks the beginning of a new relationship between Gudiya and Phoolwati who eventually emerges as a mother figure. The shimmering wife of Shambhu, Phoolwati, had already become a confidant of grandmother and took care of Gudiya as the old woman gradually began to distance herself from the mundane activities. But after her death Phoolwati becomes the sole guardian of Gudiya taking upon her the responsibility of bringing up the girl. She becomes almost a mother figure to Gudiya, protecting
her from temple politics, giving her emotional stability, providing her with what she can afford. Phoolwati in her own rustic way guides Gudiya through the difficult adolescence and becomes a firm support to the young girl whenever she is in trouble.

The first intimate connection between Phoolwati and Gudiya takes place when the girl has her menses for the first time. Unaware of the bodily functions Gudiya rushes to her grandmother for help who, having troubles of her own is reluctant to take up additional burdens. Phoolwati comes to Gudiya's rescue at this point. She guides the girl and asks her to remember not to venture into the temple for a few days because of her impure state. Gudiya is dismayed at the way people treat her for what is not a fault of her. Phoolwati, unlike grandmother, is actually patient to her.

Her reply surprised me. "It's not like that in our part of the world, Gudiya," she said in her mellifluous Bihari voice. "In our village we celebrate the arrival of womanhood, the descent of the Devi. But then your grandmother is an old lady, she has to manage the temple. Perhaps she doesn't want you to grow up, she would have preferred a little girl who would sit on her lap and listen to fairy tales forever."

"I'm too old for fairy tales," I said indignantly. "I know all about life. And besides, according to all of you I am a woman now."

She gave me a hug. "Yes you are," she said, "you are a woman, and we women need to stick together. Now that you are an
adult, not a little girl, we can be friends." (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 43-44) [Emphasis added]

Phoolwati's gesture here does wonders for the relationship. She not only assuages the fears that crop up in Gudiya's mind but also extends a hand of comradeship to her. Gudiya, devastated as she is by her ammi's behaviour, must have found this new found camaraderie between them to be reassuring.

Phoolwati provides great emotional stability to Gudiya by assuring her that she is not in anyway at fault because of her state and it is only the demands of the custom that must be adhered to. Her words also go a long way to provide Gudiya with the security that the old grandmother was finding more and more demanding to proffer.

Phoolwati's concern for Gudiya begins to show as she gradually takes over the overseeing of Gudiya. Gudiya was to join a school excursion to Simla. Pandit Kailash Shastri hearing about the planned trip dissuades her from going to the trip as his calculations pointed to some ill-luck for her. Gudiya is adamant to join the group. But Phoolwati becomes concerned after hearing what Panditji said. She asks ammi about what to do. Even though grandmother is not averse to Gudiya's planned excursion Phoolwati is not totally convinced. After having another round of discussion with Panditji she secretly withdraws Gudiya's name from the list of the travellers. She is not to take any risk when it comes to Gudiya.

On the fateful day when Gudiya was scheduled to visit Simla, ammi passes away. It is Phoolwati who takes immediate charge of the girl. In her embrace Gudiya hears the sound of the coconuts being crashed on her
grandmother's head according to the ritual prescribed by the Pandit. Phoolwati, shaken by *ammi*'s death, rues: "I have lost my Guru, Gudiya. You are all that remains" (Gokhale, *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* 63). Gudiya, now truly snapped of all the relations in the world, finds her shelter with Phoolwati. She moves to Phoolwati’s hut with all her belongings and her baggage of childhood memories.

The admiration is however mutual. When subsequently Gudiya is transported to a life of comfort, courtesy Roxanne, the Principal of her school, she misses the warmth of Phoolwati so much that she flees from the benevolent teacher’s home. Her caretaker, Phoolwati, is not at all surprised by her sudden arrival, she half expected it, and greets her with a cup of tea and a piece of *notkhatai*. She takes care to secure the girl’s position in the temple and curtly tells Pandit Kailash Shastri that instead of proclaiming a good fortune for Gudiya he should look after her well being.

"This is all just talk, Panditji," Phoolwati said tartly. "Gudiya’s grandmother blessed you too, she gave you this entire temple, twelve hundred yards of land already constructed! Or one could even say that you just took it — and now our Gudiya, our Mataji’s granddaughter, you could say her only living descendent, is homeless, penniless. How are you going to honour the memory of your Guru? Even the shastras are quite specific about this. The Guru’s family has to be honoured as your own, or else..." (Gokhale, *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* 83).
When Panditji mumbles some vague reply about Gudiya being like her daughter and that she is always welcome in the temple Phoolwati gives her curt ultimatum, "Achha, Panditji, Ram Ram! I trust you will never be wanting in the execution of your duty" (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 83).

Phoolwati herself is quite conscious of her duty of bringing up Gudiya under her own care. When Roxanne sends for the girl Phoolwati would not let Gudiya part. She dismisses the driver who has come to pick Gudiya: "Arre, you langur in a white uniform, can't you see this is the child's home?" (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 85) And with the help of Sundar Pahalwan, who has become a lover of her it takes little effort on her part to drive the hapless man away.

It is not only these little histrionics that are pointers to Phoolwati's genuine concern for Gudiya. She makes it one of her conditions that Sundar has to look after Gudiya as his adopted daughter once he proposes to Phoolwati. She becomes genuinely happy once Panditji casts Gudiya's horoscope and predicts that she would have fame, name and good fortune in abundance. Specially, the gajakeshari yoga that the Pandit mentions makes her ecstatic.

Phoolwati's face was wreathed in smiles. "With your blessings, Panditji," she said gratefully (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 110).

She discloses her secret to her adopted daughter and lets her know of the business dealings with Sundar. She shows her riches to Gudiya and when she sees the girl in a mellowed mood she becomes really concerned.
I sighed deeply, reflecting on life's ironies. Phoolwati looked concerned. "What's bothering my Gudiya?" she asked worriedly, still waving the wads of notes in her podgy hands. "Arre, Gudiya, you are born to be a princess – you have your grandmother's blessings – tell Phoolwati what you want, Gudiya, and she will get it for you. Just test your Phoolwati for once" (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 128).

Gudiya too reciprocates the feelings of Phoolwati and herself becomes too much dependent on her. When Phoolwati decides to sing the evening bhajans herself as the discs carrying ammi's voice begin to fail and the evening discussions of Panditji fail to bring back the crowds to the temple Gudiya is overawed. Seeing that Phoolwati has decided to pick up music from a master, Gudiya is reminded of her mother and begins to panic.

The very sight of the music master and the percussionist threw me into a state of panic. I was reminded of my mother and fell into the conviction that it was only a matter of time before Phoolwati too would depart as she had done (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 94).

It is Phoolwati who senses and dissuades the girl's fears.

Phoolwati, tenderest of souls, sensed my despair and took pains to convince me of her permanence. She persuaded me to join them during her lessons, but the music master confirmed that I
was not in the least musical (Gokhale, *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* 94).

Phoolwati is devastated when she finds Gudiya secretly in love with Kalki. The suspicion that Gudiya might have some sort of sexual relationship with the boy makes her furious. But practical as she is, Phoolwati soon understands "what can’t be cured must be endured" (Gokhale, *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* 122-123) and decides the best possible solution out of the imbroglio is to marry Gudiya with Kalki. She uses her good offices with Sundar to catch hold of the boy and bring him to her hut. There faced with the muscle prowess of Sundar, Kalki readily – though not very eagerly – agrees to marry Gudiya. Phoolwati, in spite of performing her duties as a guardian and caretaker of Gudiya, cannot be too happy with the situation. She is not highly impressed by Kalki and wishes that Gudiya had a better and richer husband. She feels herself to be more fortunate as she is about to marry Sundar, a man of wealth. She even offers a place to Gudiya and her lover Kalki once she settles in her own palace which Sundar is to build for her as per her wish.

After her marriage Phoolwati settles in her new home. She organises her new settlement with the help of Gudiya. It’s a pleasurable experience for both of them to buy what they think to be expensive, luxurious and colourful. After they have settled down Gudiya resolves to part with a secret of her life. She tells Phoolwati about the gold coins that were discovered when Phoolwati’s ex-husband was murdered. She also discloses where the coins are hidden. Phoolwati devices elaborate plans to perform *kar-seva* for a Shiva temple under
the Peepal tree as per instructions sent by mataji through a convenient dream. Panditji goes to Hardwar but returns too soon. Phoolwati has to doze him off with a bottle of cough syrup when he catches a bout of cold. Gudiya, accompanied by Phoolwati and Sundar excavate the gold coins. Sundar uses his underworld connections to sell these coins dating back to the days of Emperor Jehangir. They fetch a good price which Phoolwati keeps with her for safe custody. She, however, does not take a share of any part of it, though persuaded by Gudiya and instead bestows the entire amount to her.

Gudiya’s night out with Kalki makes her pregnant. When she visits the gynaecologist, it is already too late to terminate the issue. She marries Kalki though none of them were too keen to marry at this point of time. Phoolwati performs all her duties and along with her husband Sundar gives away the daughter. When Gudiya weeps during the marriage, she comforts her: “All girls cry on their wedding-day. It’s a law of nature. As for Kalki, don’t get upset if he sulks and acts difficult. Remember, you’re both young, it’ll take time to adjust” (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 165).

Though they both get married almost at the same point of time their married lives do not last long. Kalki goes to Bombay with a dream of becoming a film-star. Sundar is shot and killed because of gang rivalry. Gudiya, now a mother of a daughter named Mallika, comes back to Phoolwati. They settle quite comfortably. Phoolwati philosophically sums up “Nothing good ever lasts very long” (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 180). She tells Gudiya that she is probably better off without Kalki. And for her sake this has been a blessing in
disguise. "And I would have been left all alone if both of you weren't there for me. Perhaps it's for the best" (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 179).

Gudiya after a tumultuous childhood and an equally turbulent teenage finds herself comfortably placed. Life which has always put her through many challenges seems to have settled for her to some extent.

Gudiya's life with Phoolwati has been one of complete sympathy and understanding. The teenage girl is brought up by Phoolwati with love and care aplenty. In the absence of any near or dear one she brings up Gudiya just like her own daughter. Probably the situation occurs because of her childless state. It makes her extremely careful about Gudiya. The fear of losing one who is not a blood relation may be the reason for such excesses. However, the relationship between the two seems to be straight forward and lacks the complexities that generally involve a mother-daughter relationship. Here the author seems to have envisioned an ideal paradigm holding a mother-surrogate and a daughter-surgeon together in a bond that is mutually supportive and fulfilling.

Gudiya – Roxanne Lamba:

Gudiya's relationship with Roxanne Lamba, the Principal of "St. Judes Academy for the Socially Handicapped" is also another epitome of mother daughter relation. Gudiya becomes a favourite of the lady during her school days. The Parsi lady, moved by Gudiya's loss of her grandmother, decides to provide her unfortunate student with a decent shelter. So when Gudiya stops attending school after the death of her grandmother Roxanne invites Gudiya to her home.
Gudiya is picked up from her temple shanty by a chauffeur driven car. After some pastries and comforting words Gudiya is despatched back to her place in the temple. This marks the beginning of the intimate relationship between the two.

The next day Gudiya is summoned again by her Principal. When Phoolwati dismisses him citing Gudiya’s illness as the reason behind it, Roxanne herself appears to carry the girl to her home. Gudiya is put up in a room at the Sharp House. In spite of her husband’s reluctance the Principal declares that the girl is to stay with them till she gets fit. When Phoolwati comes to meet Gudiya, Roxanne promises to provide shelter to the girl till there was some sort of solution. Though her husband mars the occasion by clearly spelling out that this was purely a temporary arrangement and at no point of time there would be any monetary transaction, Roxanne’s good intentions do speak for themselves. Even Phoolwati is highly moved by the lady.

“Your Roxanne Madam is alright, though,” she said grudgingly, “I must admit that I was wrong about her. Your grandmother was really a saint in mortal form, see how she is looking after you even now. Wah, what luxury!” (Gokhale, *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* 75)

The lady’s kindness is reflected in her daily activities. She takes her to meet her mother Mrs Dubash. The old woman immediately develops bonhomie with Gudiya. Later when Gudiya is scared by the dogs in the house Mrs Lamba takes pains to comfort her. Gudiya falls sick again. Roxanne places a charmed
feather below her pillow in the hope that she would get well soon. Realising that Gudiya is somehow ill at ease she pokes her to tell what the matter is.

I listened sleepily, ready to doze off. But Roxanne wanted to talk to me. "There is something you are not telling me, Gudiya – you’re worrying about something," she said gently. "Has somebody been unkind to you? I have not spent as much time with you as I wanted to but we are short-staffed at school. Remember that you can tell me everything. Don’t think you are alone because your grandmother is gone" (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 80).

But Gudiya is somehow unable to bear the extreme kindness of the lady. She retracts from her Madam’s good natured gesture and wants to escape from the clutches of her stifling love.

I found her kindness somehow offensive. "I don’t want to stay here anymore," I said rudely. "I want to go back home" (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 80).

The next morning Gudiya flees from Sharp House into the comforting laps of Phoolwati where she is readily greeted. Roxanne makes an attempt to retrieve her by sending her chauffeur to pick up Gudiya. But at the insistence of Phoolwati he is treated shabbily by Sundar. The Parsi Principal does not make any further attempt to win her pupil back from the hands of Phoolwati.

Gudiya’s tryst with her Madam, however, does not end so easily. Though she leaves the Sharp House for good, the rest of the students are not so
convinced about her distance from their Principal. Gudiya learns that she is not the first beneficiary of Mrs. Roxanne Lamba's charities. A girl, who benefitted from similar favours earlier, was said to be missing. Gudiya has to encounter much inquisition about what went on inside the Sharp House. And as Gudiya is not interested in providing any details she is privy to, she is considered a 'teacher's pet.'

The behaviour of her peers forces Gudiya to judge Roxanne in a new light. The kind lady seems to be obnoxious to her since her kindness is always wrapped in the façade of charity. Gudiya's self-esteem suffers a body blow once she discovers how the attitude of the other students change towards her once she is seen to be a suffering girl in need of doles from the Parsi benefactor. Beside Gudiya's personal encounter with the lady which showed her Roxanne's stern side when someone decides to go against her will adds an element of strain in the relationship.

Something in this latest encounter with Roxanne's well-meaning insensitivity drew out a latent anger in me. Even Malavika Mehta's effrontery was more bearable – at least it could be tackled head on. The condescension implicit in Roxanne Madam's charity embarrassed and enraged me beyond endurance. Grandmother had inculcated in me a fierce sense of my own worth. I resolved that someday, somehow, somewhere, I would get even with all of them (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 103).
However, her relationship with Roxanne Ma’am does not end on a sour note. After a long stay abroad Roxanne returns home and invites Gudiya for a dinner. During the dinner, while enquiring about Gudiya’s studies, the lady chokes and dies. Gudiya is filled with remorse.

I was left alone with Roxanne. I examined her face, gentle and kind in repose. She was the only entirely good person I had ever encountered. From the time I had joined St. Jude’s, she had encouraged me to believe in myself, and she in turn had always trusted and believed in me. I had not repaid her faith, I had not managed to demonstrate my love (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 153).

The very word ‘demonstrate’ goes on to show the feeling of Gudiya towards Roxanne Ma’am. It is not that she does not appreciate her teacher. Rather she finds her to be the most selfless person she has ever come in contact with. But it is her vanity as well as inferiority complex which have separated her from her well meaning madam. Gudiya can not appreciate being pitied. So in spite of all her love for Roxanne she cannot overcome her uneasiness and discomfort. Now that her teacher is dead, Gudiya can put off the veil that she has used so long.

I wanted above all things to demonstrate my love, to bring some ritual and dignity to her departure. I ran upstairs to Roxanne’s bedroom, oblivious to the ghosts that inhabited it, and rummaged through her drawers until I found the eagle feather she had once placed under my pillow, very long ago. I located the candles kept in
reserve for power cuts. Returning to the living room I gathered together three elaborately carved peg-tables, and set up a sort of make-shift altar, with six candles arranged on cut-glass ashtrays. I knelt down. Placing the feather beneath her head, I ceremoniously kissed her damp forehead. Then I ran out of the room, out into the dark, all the way to Phoolwati’s house (Gokhale, Gods, Graves and Grandmother 155).

Gudiya’s benefactor continues to cast her benevolent glance upon her favourite student even after her death. In her will Roxanne leaves her share of wealth that she is supposed to inherit from her mother to be divided among St. Academy for the Socially Handicapped and Gudiya. Her generosity is, however, challenged by her husband and nephew. The dispute remains unsettled since, Mrs Dubash, the mother of Roxanne survives her daughter and the question of bequeathing her wealth is deferred to a later date.

Roxanne Lamba serves Gudiya most selflessly. She among all the persons that Gudiya comes in contact with tries to help her without any interest on her own part. Even Phoolwati somehow believes that by looking after Gudiya she is only repaying the revered Mataji to whom she is indebted for her earthly and spiritual well-being. But no such earthly or otherworldly motive moved Roxanne. She served Gudiya out of pure good intention. But Gudiya cannot reciprocate to her teacher’s gestures. In spite of seeing the human side of Roxanne she fails to repay what she owes to her teacher. Probably the very nature of Gudiya is an obstacle towards fostering this relationship. Gudiya
attempting to imitate her mother's reckless attitude from her childhood can in no way accommodate Roxanne in her scheme of things. She is too stubborn to get into another person's mould. It is only because her view of the world complements so closely with that of Phoolwati that she can accept her largesse. The same is not the case with her teacher. Besides Gudiya suffers from a fierce sense of pride which does not allow her to accept any charity. She mistakenly believes that the good things in life are owed to her. As others see through this sham of hers she terminates her relationship with Roxanne which if carried to the fullest extent would have definitely ended in a better life for her.

Gudiya had lost her own mother, though not in death. Perhaps that's why the loss had left a scar that never healed completely. She had been lucky enough to be loved and nurtured by several mother-figures. But did all this taken together make up for the loss she incurred so early in life? That first loss seems to have left her emotionally impaired and unstable. It is only at the end when she herself has become a mother to a daughter that she can strike a steady poised relationship with Phoolwati, the surviving one of the various mother-surrogates in her life.

Section II: The Thousand Faces of Night

*The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) portrays the many varied facets of Indian womanhood through the interaction between Devi, the protagonist, and three mother-figures - her grandmother; an elderly maid, and her own mother. Their influence on her life is profound, but more importantly Devi seems to share
the fate that they themselves underwent; she seems to belong to the legacy to which these maternal figures belonged. Her grandmother through her stories shapes her beliefs, her dreams, prepares her for what to experience in life and teaches her what is expected of her in her capacity as a woman. Her mother, Sita tries to take care of her, plans her fortune in as meticulous a way as she planned her own garden and finds her plans going awry with her daughter, as they did with her own life. Mayamma the worst sufferer, makes Devi realise the pains of womanhood. Of these relationships Devi’s relation with her mother, Sita is unique. Whereas, in case of the other two women Devi has little or nothing against them, in case of her mother, it is an ambivalent relationship which is often hostile, but is not altogether without its sense of amity. This relationship between Devi and her own mother, which is much more problematic and intriguing, will be explored in a subsequent chapter.

Devi and her Grandmother:

The most intimate bond Devi had was with her grandmother, whose daily dose of mythical stories gave Devi a glimpse, into what womanhood holds for her even when she was a child. Indeed the picture Devi gives us of her grandmother is a reconstruction of the old woman from memories of childhood tinged with her own subsequent experiences. Her life thus may be seen as a continuation of what her grandmother had experienced. Again, the stories supposedly told by the grandmother are actually co-authored texts at the stage, with Devi now grown up weaving her own thread(s) into the reminisced original. Devi herself admits:
But I was a child then, and the answers I now reconstruct were perhaps never really hers. Perhaps I put the oracular, paradoxical words into her generous, buck-toothed mouth each time I recall the fables of childhood (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* Prelude).

It was, however, not only the stories of the grandmother that basked in old age wisdom; the life she herself led was full of all sorts of mysterious rituals. For the child, Devi, visiting her grandmother during the summer vacations was an escape from the world of 'order, reason, progress' (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 26) that her mother represented.

My grandmother’s domain, the ritual in which she encased our arrivals and departures, our visits to relatives or the village temple, was more ambiguous. It was also richer, irresistible, and through her I fell in love with the god-like heroes and heroines whose stories were as real, more real, to her than our own (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 26).

In the grandmother’s world Devi learnt to associate life, her life, with that of gods and goddesses, kings and princesses of a mythological world. The picture of the story telling grandmother lulling the children to sleep is age-old. The children develop an intimacy with the old ladies who are only too happy to play the motherly role once again. *The Thousand Faces of Night* portrays this traditional matriarch in an Indian home – the grandmother who mothers over the entire household. Yet when subjected to a deconstructive analysis the portrait reflects
emptiness and withering caused by long years of austerity and repression as a widow.

My grandmother was a wizened old woman, illiterate, and widowed in her early thirties. She was as thin as a stick. Her shoulder-length, lank grey hair was tied in a never-changing knot about the size of a large gooseberry. The most noticeable feature of her long, bony face was her shiny buck-teeth; she had her own teeth till she died. But her face was also lit up by her brown, tapering eyes. They could have been called beautiful once, I suppose, but what made them alive was a trick she had of moving her eyeballs quickly, side to side, like a Bharat Natyam dancer wound up to perform in fast motion. As a child I often tried to imitate this rapid movement, which became almost frenzied when she told me her goriest stories. But I could never do it right, though I practiced for hours in front of the mirror (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 25).

By fashioning herself after the inimitable story-teller, Devi ensures that she too would vie for a story or two of her own. The act of looking at the mirror distances herself from what Lacan calls the 'real', and helps her gain an objective overview of her identity as a story-teller.

The little girl, playing a game of imitating her grandmother's features brings out the intimacy of the relationship between the two. Devi, in playing the part of her grandmother shows her fondness for the old woman. The
grandmother obviously shared the feeling as she waited eagerly every summer
on the stone porch outside her house for her grandchild and wept unashamedly
every time she saw her. She welcomed Devi and her parents in an auspicious
manner purifying them of their pollutions of city life. For Devi it was an entrance
into another world, a life less ordinary. Seen at another level the grandmother is
an artist per se, though her medium is oral narration, rituals and talk-forms. So
when Devi looks backward to reconstruct her grandmother and her stories she is
enacting the role laid down by Alice Walker – the modern woman searching ‘her
[grand]mother’s garden’. Devi’s reconstruction of the holiday ‘home’ of her
childhood may be understood in this light.

In my grandmother’s home, I didn’t need a window to look at a
mysterious, unknown world outside.

And most of all, in my memories of those summers, my
grandmother’s house is crowded with superhuman warriors, men
and women destined to lead heroic lives. For many summers, I
thrived on a diet of her caressing gnarled fingers and her stories of
golden splendour (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 27).

Almost in the same vein, way back in 1932 Dorothy Livesay (b. 1909) makes a
loving, nostalgic invocation to the ‘grandmother’ in her poem “Green Rain”. As
memory surges back, the image of the grandmother becomes the overwhelming
sign of all that had been dear and treasured.

I remember long veils of green rain

Feathered like the shawl of my grandmother...
I remember the road...

...which leads to my grandmother's house,
A warm house...

And the silence, full of rain's falling
Was like my grandmother's parlour
Alive with herself and her voice, rising and falling –
Rain and wind intermingled ...

Now I remember the day
As I remember the grandmother.

I remember the feathery fringe of her shawl (Livesay 134).

However, as Devi looks back to her [grand]mother's garden' (a la Alice Walker) in later years it elicits a complex response in the young woman. It is not uncritical, she realizes that the stories that the grandmother weaved were not mere fantasies. They were anecdotes meant to educate Devi and tie her up with her heritage. The grandmother with her loving care and smooth tongue bound Devi to a long lasting tradition. The relationship between the two, therefore, connected the granddaughter to the world of the grandmother, a world the latter had inherited in her turn. The stories are a device by which the grandmother impresses upon the young Devi the charms of the old world, a world which she is expected to adhere to. So the relationship between the women of first and third generations is not simply one of love and adoration; it opens up the question of generational dialectics where the young ones are expected to follow the tradition of the aged.
My grandmother’s stories were no ordinary bedtime stories. She chose each for a particular occasion, a story in reply to each of my childish questions. She had an answer for every question. But her answers were not simple: they had to be decoded…her stories fashioned moulds. Ideal moulds, impossibly ambitious, that challenged the puny listener to stretch her frame and fit into the vast spaces, live up to her illustrious ancestors (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 27).

Devi had listened to these stories as an enraptured child. But as she eventually grows up through ordeals she eventually yearns for ‘a story of her own’ (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 40). As a child, she fantasized about being a woman, strong and deadly, the destroyer of all evils. In her childhood dreams she could identify herself with the heroines of her grandmother’s stories thus accepting the norms laid down by the old lady.

I had, of course, to respond to my grandmother’s years of over-rich, unadulterated nourishment with a story of my own. It was impossible to hear her stories year after year, stories of a womanhood I would soon grow into, without insinuating myself on to that fantastic canvas (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 40).

But experience taught Devi that womanhood, the dreams of which she constantly fed upon, was not to be cherished so much. And it was her grandmother who was first to point this out. When Devi bled for the first time her grandmother said:
‘It means that you are a woman now, my child. It means that you will be a mother.’

Even before I could get used to this new idea, she said, ‘But Devi, motherhood is more than the pretty picture you see of a tender woman bent over the baby she is feeding at her breast. A mother has to walk strange and tortuous paths’ (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 88).

The grandmother in her own cryptic style seems to point to the two facets of womanhood – the immense potential and paradoxically the immense pain that makes a woman, a heroine in her own right. So the ushering of womanhood is not something to be celebrated. Being a woman she has realized through first hand experience how far a real woman is from reaching the mythical heights. Here is a puzzling enigma which proves a stumbling block for the narrator’s imaginary flights.

In my grandmother’s mind, the link between her stories and our own lives was a very vital one. But she could not always find a precise mythological equivalent for the puzzling experiences the people we knew had. The lesser lives we knew did not always rise to the heroic proportions of my mother’s version of Gandhari’s sacrifice.

I must have, as I grew older, begun to see the fine cracks in the bridge my grandmother built between the stories I loved, and the less self-contained, more sordid stories I saw unfolding around
me. The cracks I now see are no longer fine, they gape as if the glue that held them together was counterfeit in the first place. But the gap I now see is also a debt: I have to repair it to vindicate my beloved storyteller (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 30-31).

This is Devi’s way of paying her tribute to her grandmother. She realizes the puny, frail individual of our sordid world can rarely reach heroic dimensions. But nevertheless, she makes an effort to live a life that could be straight out of one of her grandmother’s stories. In her childhood dreams, in her effort to adjust to an Indian way of marital life, for which her American years had left her unprepared, Devi tries to imitate her grandmother’s prescribed way of life. But she accepts such a life not without a grumble. The new way of living a life must clash with the old ways and the resultant conflict leaves Devi shattered. But Devi has no choice, she must try to accept the norms set by her grandmother and yet she must rebel. Her early imbibing of her grandmother’s ideals and her essential rejection of the same make her relationship with her grandmother so problematic; the latter’s influence proves simultaneously a reference point and an inhibiting imposition.

**Devi – Mayamma:**

Mayamma is the other storyteller whom Devi comes to know after her marriage. Devi’s relationship with Mayamma assumes less intense proportions than her relationship with her mother or her grandmother. Mayamma is connected to Devi by virtue of being the caretaker of her husband’s house.
Mayamma's stature, however, is more of a matron than that of a servant – a change brought over largely due to the absence of her mistress. Devi is profoundly influenced by her. This influence is acknowledged in the 'Prelude' itself: "What I do remember, with greater certainty, are the words of a more recent, pragmatic storyteller." This "more recent, pragmatic storyteller" represents an aspect of womanhood which remained untaught to Devi by her mother or grandmother. Mayamma's life has been one of immense suffering, pain and emptiness; but it has also been a life of courageous endurance. She may represent ill luck, suffering and fruitlessness but she also stands for the immense capacity of women to endure, to survive, to fight back. A mother figure to Devi, Mayamma makes a profound impact on Devi's life and hence her relationship with Devi assumes critical importance. Not that Devi would follow her model; rather she stirs a dormant anger and revulsion in Devi against the traditional treatment of women.

The two do not strike a cordial relationship at the first instance. Rather a sort of cold animosity prevails as they meet each other. Mayamma, long used to ruling over the household is apprehensive of being forced to give way to the whims of a new mistress. Devi, on her part is unsure of what the 'old crone' has in store for her.

She (Mayamma) received me at the doorstep, an unsmiling little figure half-hidden behind my welcoming father-in-law. I am to call him Baba. I have not yet thought of what to call the old woman. I had felt an unforgivable sense of relief when I heard that I did not
have a mother-in-law. Now, looking at Mayamma's pinched face, I have my doubts (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 48).

Mayamma's presence in Devi's life as a surrogate mother-in-law opens new possibilities. The initial lack of trust is not quick to evaporate and Devi makes a conscious attempt not to tread into Mayamma's long chartered territory. ...I could sense her almost palpable anxiety about the threat of the upstart to her long regime. Slowly, slowly, I must make her believe that I am not interested in playing mistress. She has the house, I have, well I have Mahesh (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 50).

However, when Devi's world falls apart, she turns to Mayamma for solace. The old family maid has no mythical tale to narrate; instead she unfolds her own story, the story of her life. Mayamma's story brings out what it means to be an Indian woman in a backward, orthodox family - the silent suffering and helpless endurance – and provides Devi the key to survival. As Devi's marriage slowly sours, her story seems to get merged into that of Mayamma; both find themselves caught in an intricate social web. The initial hostility between these two women of two generations and hailing from two different walks of life recedes to give way to a compassionate bond between the two.

Mayamma's life-story, dull and uneventful as it may appear, however, underscores the status of women according to the traditional Indian ideal of womanhood, which reduced the woman to a mere production machine whose target was supposed to give birth to as many male children as possible. She does not have her right even on her own body. Mayamma was married to a
village ruffian at the tender age of twelve. Her mother-in-law agreed to accept her as her daughter-in-law because her horoscope promised that she would bear many sons. "Unable to check Mayamma’s insides herself, she had contended herself with the astrologer’s promise that Mayamma would bear her many strong grandsons (Harihanan, Thousand Faces 80)." The mother-in-law could no longer hide her impatience when Mayamma showed no signs of fulfilling this promise. Caught between her mother-in-law’s wild gaze and her husband’s bestial lust, "Mayamma welcomed her penance like an old friend. What else would keep the roving eye still?" (Harihan, Thousand Faces 80).

The ‘gaze’ of Mayamma’s mother-in-law, to draw from western mythology, is akin to that of Medusa; both have a petrifying effect. In one interpretation of the Medusa myth, Joseph Campbell sees her as a ‘Great Mother’ (153); she is “the womb and tomb of the world: the primal, one and only ultimate reality of the world” (Meaney 25-26). Mayamma’s mother-in-law, who for her part has played this ‘primal’ role, now wishes to see her daughter-in-law, Mayamma, play the same role all over again. As Mayamma fails to be an image of her mother-in-law, she faces the open hostility of the mother-in-law. It is no wonder that the mother-in-law sees Mayamma only as a womb, a mechanism for procreation. After ten years of longing, when Mayamma loses her first child due to a miscarriage she only asks why all this must happen to her. For Mayamma’s mother-in-law the ‘womb’ of Mayamma has turned into a ‘tomb’. Mayamma is powerless against this terrifying Medusa, as she has not been able to replicate the fertility of her surrogate mother. Campbell warns, “more the power of the mother is feared and
repressed the more certain and terrible is her return and recurrence as the nightmare of her offspring” (Meaney 27). This is the power Mayamma confronts and fears; so she is ready to go to any length to avert the gaze. If rituals and penances can save her it is only a small price to pay. In the original Medusa myth it is the men who must fear the gaze of the intemperate Medusa. In Mayamma’s case it is one woman who must suffer from the horrific gaze of another woman, displaying the patriarchal forces at play.

The first few months of Mayamma’s married life proves to be happy. She has her tender moments with her husband; but the romance, if any, is short-lived. As she does not bear a child as per the expectations, she is tortured by her husband. Soon, the mother-in-law joins company. She thrusts penance after penance on Mayamma for her inability to give birth to a son. Mayamma accepts her fate without any question.

Mayamma’s penances can appease neither the divine forces nor her mother-in-law whose hostility increased with every passing day.

I waited ten years for a son. Years came and went, so did astrologers. I was destined to have a son, they said. To be taken care of in my old age. I scared destiny away with my over-eager pleas, my weekly fasts, my silent and humble apology to an impatient mother-in-law. She tore my new saris and gave me yesterday’s rice to eat. What is the use of feeding a barren woman? (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 112)
It may be noted how a woman – an elderly one in the present case – internalizes the patriarchal ideology, and becomes instrumental in imposing it on the psyche of the younger women. Mayamma’s story represents a typical syndrome of orthodox Hindu household’s yearning for a child, especially a son. The social framework attaches great value on women’s motherhood. In this context one may refer to M.N. Roy’s ironical essay on “The Ideal of Indian Womanhood” (cited in Kundu, “M.N. Roy and Indian Womanhood” 51), where he finds an apt analogy for the Indian woman not in the cat that is comparatively free, but in the cow, tethered to endless compulsive procreation in order to contribute to the proprietor’s coffer. Consequently, women grow up cherishing the prospect of motherhood from an early age. They also receive much encouragement from their marital families to become mothers. Until they achieve motherhood, they are not fully co-opted into their new household. The birth of a child greatly improves the status of a woman in her husband’s household and secures her position as a member of the family. As a consequence of this obsession for a new born, any woman, unable to be a mother faces great hostility at the hands of her in-laws and most often the mother-in-law is the most potent force behind such oppression. The practice is age old and even has certain degree of religious sanction:

A barren wife may be superseded in the eighth year; one whose children have died, in the tenth; one who bears (only) daughters, in the eleventh; but one who says unpleasant things (may be superseded) immediately (Doniger and Smith 207).
Mayamma, for whom '(p)enance was my grey-haired school teacher' (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 113) knows that she has no other way but to carry on:

A woman without a child, say the sages, goes to hell (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 81).

So after years of rigorous austerity when she becomes pregnant she cannot but feel exultation:

When the goddess blessed my womb and the seed ripened, what joy rushed through my blood! I couldn't walk, I had to skip, run. Talk, sing. Oh! I was mad with excitement and impatience. (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 122).

The mother-in-law, Mayamma's 'arch enemy' (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 122) goes out of her way to play the role of the matriarch, the protector of her grandchild. She puts the paste of green chillies into hot bubbling oil, waves a broom and rinses it, every time Mayamma goes out, to curb any evil influence. For more effective therapy she burns the tip of a broom. But neither Mayamma's earnest prayers, nor her mother-in-law's antics to safeguard the grandson are effective and Mayamma loses her child at birth.

Ironically, it is Mayamma who is held responsible for her great loss. The society's response in such cases is stereotype and reflects its patriarchal leanings. Even the doctor advises coldly:

A woman must learn to bear some pain, he mumbled. What can I do about the sins of your previous birth? (Hariharan, Thousand Faces Preface)
And of course the greatest oppressor of Mayamma is her mother-in-law.

Mayamma's fortune takes an upswing as she gives birth to Raja two years later. But after eight years her husband disappears, taking all the money with him. Mayamma is again held responsible by her mother-in-law. Though her husband never returns "(s)he got him back all right" (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 81) in the form of her son. At fourteen he threatened his mother and took away her last remaining gold bangles. A few years later he snatched away her diamond earrings after hitting her with a frying pan.

Mayamma's story is, in a way, a repetition or reconciliation of that of her mother-in-law; both the women suffer in much the same way with the men folk indulging in drinking and whoring, the pain of not having a descendant, the loss of near and dear ones. What seems significant is that they still remain 'arch enemies' (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 122). They share much of the agony that womanhood has imposed on them and yet cannot look beyond the patriarchal view. Hatred generates further hatred. Even at her dying moments, the mother-in-law has no olive branch to offer.

Her blood I cannot forget. Even as the blood gurgled in her throat – blood, phlegm, vomit, she accused me with the hatred in her eyes. I held the pail up to her propped-up head. She brought up all the poison. Her throat began to rattle. She grasped my hand and stared at me, her eyes glazing over with the whiteness of death.

You ill-starred slut, you have brought all this upon my household. Her last words, the blessings of a mother-in-law. She
died with her claws firm on my hands, her eyes wide open. I pulled the eyelids down, but they refused to budge (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 120).

Finally, the truant son also succumbs to a life of excesses. He falls ill. It is at this turn that the terrible waste of Mayamma's life becomes apparent. A life of prolonged ill-treatment and betrayal which had reduced her to the status of a machine - sex machine, procreating machine, providing machine - eventually withers her emotions.

When he fell ill with a high fever, there was no tenderness left in Mayamma's hands. They were efficient, cool, but they withheld reassurance. For two months sat by him all night, bathed him, and dried the racked body with a soft old sari. He had never been a son to her as much as he was then, now that she had curved the flow of her pleas. The fever rose and fell, rose and fell till he was reduced to helpless, delirious moaning. The day he died, Mayamma wept as she had not done for years. She wept for her youth, her husband, the culmination of a life's handiwork: now all these had been snatched from her (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 82).

The bare language only serves to express the vacuity and futility of the great waste that her life has been. At the end, she finds some solace in Parvatiamma. The way she mentions the lady - "my sister, my mother, my daughter" (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 82) - highlights the possibility of a multifaceted relationship between women, irrespective of their social status,
biological age, cultural background. The ‘heart of the matter’ is that somewhere deep within both undergo the same predicament of the alienated woman; and for each other they can serve the multiple-and-rich and reciprocative figure of ‘an unknown twin’ (a la Atwood).

Though Mayamma fails to share any emotional bond with her mother-in-law, her suffering makes her aware of the pains of womanhood allowing her to sympathize with other women facing similar lot. She can feel for Devi who in spite of her education and social status suffers from loneliness and childlessness – the two curses Mayamma has to bear all through her life. Her position as the maid of the house obviously does not allow her to play the role of a stern mother-in-law but nevertheless it also does not envisage the kind of endearment she shows toward Devi who eventually becomes a daughter figure in relation to the old domestic help.

Devi, who thought of having Mahesh all by herself, can hardly share a moment’s intimacy with her husband. Mahesh is constantly out on tours and even when he stays at home he is too distant never allowing Devi to make any foray into his matter-of-fact business-world. Devi is too distressed when the public world of Mahesh enters her private domain as her husband plans a big bash for his colleagues. Mayamma understands Devi’s predicament and makes naïve attempts to soothe Devi’s hurt.

All afternoon Mayamma had coaxed me with her consolation, little plans to bring back peace. You will get a chance to wear your new saris. And Baba would be proud if he knew what a good housewife
you have become. You know how he values hospitality, especially in a woman. I had to smile at her crude attempts. All the same, I felt abashed somehow (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 72).

What is of importance here is that Devi can recognize the genuine concern of Mayamma beneath her simple persuasion which can be pathetic and annoying at the same time. “The old woman is garrulous enough if I seek her out, droning half-stories about a past that oppresses me like a life I want to forget” (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 79).

A common factor in their lives also helps to bring them closer to each other – the failure to give timely birth to an inheritor. The bond assumes more intimate proportion when they learn that they both cannot be mothers. The memories of her ‘aborted motherhood’ haunt Mayamma still.

My womb slips down, sagging with the weight of my greed for motherhood. I can feel it. I need no doctor now. I know it well, its desire to escape. I could put my hand up and pull, pull. Tear it out and throw it on the garbage heap to rot. Raja has no use for it any more. He is reduced to ashes that I fed into the river’s mouth. I push it back into place each time, a memorial to my aborted motherhood (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 122-23).

A similar predicament brings them close to each other like never before. Devi, who comes to term with her barrenness, feels in many ways drawn towards Mayamma. She realizes that like Mayamma, her identity too has been reduced to
that of the woman with a barren womb; everything about her now seems to be lost except her infertile womb.

'Why are you looking at me like that,' I asked.

'You look so fragile, so feminine,' Mahesh said. 'It's hard to believe that you don't want a child'.

Even as he says the words, I can feel myself diminishing. I become a wispy, insubstantial cloud that can be blown out of sight, that can break apart when touched.

I feel myself getting blurred in Mahesh's eyes. The focus gets softer and softer, till everything dissolves into nothingness, everything but my stubborn, unrelenting womb. (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 93) [Emphasis added]

In this annihilation of her identity as an individual in her own right, and the consequent alienation, Devi has now no one to turn to save her fellow-sufferer. The old woman has not much to offer except for the advice of penance; but she surely can be compassionate in a way which no one else can.

Is there no other way? 'Devi, Devi', said Mayamma, when without warning I buried my face in her shoulder and wept.

'There may be, child. What does an old woman know? Pray, pray, Devi. Tell the beads till your fingers are calloused and numb with exhaustion. Sit between five fires in a grove of penance for the sake of your unborn son. Find Shashti's head, a smooth stone the size of a man's head that rests under a sanctified banyan tree.
Offer the freshest, most luscious of fruits, flowers and rice to the rocky goddess. Drink the potion blessed by Jaganmata, slit a goat's throat at Kali's shrine. Only the goddess knows what knives of pain twist and turn in a woman's heart (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 93-94).

Mayamma lists the catalogue of atavistic rituals which is the only teaching handed down to her by the patriarchal ideology of a stagnant society. But Devi rejects the assumptions of the older order, that child-birth is the supreme goal of a woman. Not only does she refuse to perform ritual, but also medical treatment; and this refusal reflects her rejection of the patriarchal construct of a woman. Mayamma had not questioned the ideology; she could not. She blamed herself and suffered alienation. Devi defied the ideology; she could, owing to her education and status. But she too suppresses the pain of humiliation and alienation.

It is excruciating pain that unites Mayamma and Devi. The relationship between them cannot be envisaged in isolation. One must simultaneously focus on the relationship between Mayamma and her mother-in-law and the effect it has on the subsequent relationship. Mayamma can never reconcile with her mother-in-law who has been deeply rooted in the traditional patriarchal ideology. However, the suffering Mayamma endures teaches her to be compassionate towards others and to see through the hollowness of many a tradition. Otherwise, it would have been highly unlikely for Devi and Mayamma, who differ in many aspects to share a common platform. The mother-daughter relationship, even in
its most complex set up – the dreaded mother-in-law and the scared daughter-in-law – achieves a final reconciliation out of the initial hostility. And as Mayamma shows even if one relationship fails there is always the hope for the next one.

**Section III: The Binding Vine**

Shashi Deshpande’s Sahitya Akademi award winning novel, *The Binding Vine* (1993) captures various facets of mother-daughter relationship. The novel focuses on the intriguing psychological interplay that goes on between a daughter and a mother and how the complex social systems condition and mould such a relationship. The novel in its baffling complexity probably explores all possible dimensions of the said relationship. Of these relationships, two stand out to be amicable and mutually supportive. The first one is between Urmi and her dead daughter Anu, whereas the second one is between Urmi and her step mother-in-law, Akka.

**Urmi – Anu:**

The novel opens with Urmi mourning the loss of her child Anu. As she tries to cope with her personal tragedy, she is frustrated by the intimidating care and concern of her mother, Inni and her childhood friend, Vanaa. All their attempts to put her in a normal state only make Urmi conscious of her unfathomable loss. The intensity of her suffering comes out the moment Vanaa reminds that Urmi had the courage and tenacity to come out of a crisis even when she was a little girl. She reacts: “Why don’t you say it straight off, Vanaa? I
know what you are trying to tell me. But that was just a hurt, a small hurt, and this is my child, Vanaa, it's my child" (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 8). In her moment of pain Urmi feels all this is born out of some 'Hubris'; she has to suffer as she is privileged, as "she had too much" (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 8). Urmi's reaction to Anu's death has a touch of self-accusation which under normal circumstances would have been quite improbable from a rational mind like her. But probably her maternal instinct makes her feel responsible for her child and the loss of her girl somehow compels her to make such a fatalistic observation.

Though Urmi suffers immensely, paradoxically she almost savours the excruciating pain as it is her only connection with her daughter. If she is to overcome the pain she has also to get resigned to the fact of her daughter's death forever, which she is not yet ready to do. Her agonizing pain is, ironically her only relief:

> There can be no vaulting over time. We have to walk every step of the way, however difficult or painful it is; we can avoid nothing. And I have no desire to leap into the future, either, to project myself into a time when all this pain will be a thing of the past, healed and forgotten. This pain is all that's left to me of Anu. Without it, there will be nothing left to me of her; I will lose her entirely (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 9).

Her clinging to her daughter's memory is akin to a mother's holding her child in her lap. According to the classification made by Ann Dally, Urmi is in the *enclosure* state (Dally 10) when she loses Anu. Anu is almost a part of Urmi's
existence, a part of her own body. In this instinct-governed state both Urmi and her child remain absorbed in each other and the interaction is so complete that Urmi comprises the entire environment of her daughter. Naturally, Anu's death means almost a tearing away of a part of the body for Urmi. Her memory of the moment of Anu's death has almost a physical dimension:

The silence is restful. There are no sounds except for the tick tock of a timepiece. And the beating of my heart. I remember the sound of Anu's heart beating, her breathing. I knew the exact moment she died; I heard her expel her breath – a loud harsh sound that tore into me. Then all the tumult died down and there was silence. In a moment, the cushioning left me and the terrible certainty of her death came to me (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 14).

Anu's untimely death tests Urmi to the greatest levels of psychological tolerance. She feels benumbed; the pain leaves her with no capacity to feel at all. A dull agonizing pain throttles her from within.

Why can't I feel anyone's pain? Kishore lying beside me in bed, his arms by his sides, his profile sharp and clear as always, and the tears pouring down his face. When was this? The night after Anu's death? I could have wiped his tears, but I didn't. I watched with a detached curiosity instead. How could a person cry so soundlessly? And now Vanaa. Has Anu taken all my capacity to feel away with her? I begin to bang my head against the wall. I can hear the dull
rhythmic thud thud. There’s nothing else. No pain at all (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 14-15).

The daughter is just not a near one to the mother but in Beauvoir’s words the ‘double’ (Beauvoir 527). She encompasses a part of the mother. Naturally with Anu’s death, Urmi is no longer her own self; she loses a part of her own being, her sensitivity, and more importantly her hope. What is fascinating that this hopelessness dawns before Urmi in the form of a childhood experience. She remembers the game she used to play with her friends in her girlhood where they had to imagine and describe the most horrible vision. Urmi feels herself to be ‘the final victor’ (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 20) in this morbid game. The only difference from her childhood self is that she can now discern the smell which she could not describe as a child. “Now I know what it was. It was the smell of hopelessness” (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 21). Urmi’s diving deep into her childhood experiences, especially a sensory one beyond what words can express, is at once an identification with her daughter and the instinctual world that she dwelt in. In her hopelessness Urmi dwells on that self of hers with which she can mostly identify with Anu. Her acceptance of her hopeless state is thus akin to recreation of her daughter while her simultaneous resolve to get over such a condition means the loss of Anu for ever. Hence is her dilemma. It is only through the pain that she can get connected to Anu and overcoming pain and rejecting her daughter for ever is therefore no less painful.

It’s cruel to leave the dead behind and go on, but we have no choice, we have to let them go.
Let them go? But it's Anu who won't let me go. She comes to me, over and over again she comes to me (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 21).

When asked by one of her old acquaintances Urmi says that she has only a son, thus negating her dead daughter's existence. The moment she does so she is filled with intense self-remorse.

Only one, a son... the words keep hammering in my mind. How could I, oh God, how could I? That was betrayal, treachery, how could I deny my Anu? I can feel the grittiness of the sand under my palm as I push my hand deeper into the sand, pour more sand on it, smoothing the sandy ridges flat, patting it into shape, angry little pats that hurt and are somehow satisfying. Only one son... how could I? (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 106)

It is this private realm of grief, of pain that Urmi is not ready to share. An intrusion into this space means an intrusion into her relationship with Anu. She is fed up with people treating her like an abnormal being – "as if grief has pitted my skin or something" (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 22). The meaningless words of consolation only irritate her. She had not had enough of her daughter and no words can console her.

Urmi's motherly instinct makes her wonder, "Does a person's value increase with age? And up to what point? I can still remember someone saying after Aju died, "Well he was old" (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 23). Urmi remembers
every moment of her life with little Anu. It is her caring, nursing, weaning of the
little baby that struck the tie and tightened it day after day.

I wake up to hear the soft snuffling sounds of her breathing by my
side; I can smell her sweet baby flesh. Sometimes, as if I have
gone back in time, her milky, ammoniac, talcum odour comes back
to me; my breasts feel heavy and painful, as if they are gorged with
milk. Once again I can feel the softness of her body in my arms, the
heaviness of her head flopping over my shoulder; I can feel her
toes, scrabbling at my midriff.

And there are memories. Strange that the memory that
haunts me most often is that of her angry face when I tried to wean
her. How resolutely she refused the bottle, how angrily she glared
at me.... (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 21).

Here is an illustration of Beauvoir's analysis of the mother-child relationship,
which she finds both complex and interesting. The child becomes the mother's
alter ego upon whom the mother is contended to shower all her feelings and
affections; but the identification between the two is never complete as the child
too has its own individual self and can not be fiddled to every tune of the mother.

The relationship in Beauvoir's view turns more baffling as the mother like a
beloved feels elated at being necessary to her object of love. But whereas a
beloved gets a return of her share of love, the mother can expect no such
reciprocity. A child has no value system ingrained in her and accepts the
mother's cares as natural. So the mother herself is left to justify what she does.
The mother herself construes the value system, which her daughter so completely lacks. Beauvoir rubbishes the concept of saintly motherhood as a distortion:

Maternity is usually a strange mixture of narcissism, altruism, idle day dreaming, sincerity, bad faith, devotion and cynicism (Beauvoir 528).

Considered in this light Urmi’s memory of her daughter’s angry face can be seen as a construct of the guilt feeling that she experiences for not being able to protect her child. Urmi realizes not only Anu’s vulnerability as a little child but also her own as a mother. Her grief is not only ‘altruistic’ but has a touch of ‘narcissism’ as well – in fact her feeling is not only one of grief, but of fear as well, the fear of death. And even Urmi does not recognize this fear. She does not realize that she is again imitating one of her earlier childhood games of lying down motionless on the ground and pretending to be dead. Only when she has a bout of asthmatic attack and she goes on fighting for every breath she realizes that she will escape death; that her resolve to live on has not ended with Anu. To conquer her feeling Urmi must occasionally put on her altruistic cloak:

But to go on like this is to wrong the living – Kartik above all, Kartik who watches me so anxiously, so fearfully. I cannot wrong him. I must let Anu go (Deshpande, Binding Vine 22).

But at other moments Urmi also realizes that the struggle is hers alone and only she can overcome it. Reassuring her son, Kartik, she realizes:
That wasn't just a vague, soothing sound, meant to reassure a child. I meant it. I won't die if I can help it. It was when I was struggling to breathe that I knew what I was doing – I was working hard at not dying. Each breath I struggled to take was an affirmation of my will to live...

We're connected to our physical selves by the fragile thread of our wills. It's only when the thread snaps that it's all over. That hasn't happened to me, not as yet. I want to live. And I won't break down. I'm in full control of myself (Deshpande, Binding Vine 20).

To assert her lively self over her death-in-life existence, Umrii has no option but to bite the bullet. She has to forget Anu, to let Anu go which for her is betrayal of the dead. Yet she has no choice:

...No, I must reject these memories, I have to conquer them. This is one battle I have to win if I am to go on living. And yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget is to betray (Deshpande, Binding Vine 21).

The death of Anu forces Urmi into a unique crisis of choice. There is the pain of loss, grief at estrangement, fear of death, dilemma over giving up one's own daughter. The crisis reveals the complexity of the relationship – the identification between the mother and the daughter as well as the simultaneous need to distance one from the other. The relationship is unique in the sense that generally it is the daughter who has to move away from the mother, while here it is the other way round. One can only say that the crisis leaves Urmi a stronger
and a more sensitive woman which helps her to identify with other suffering women and thus absorb her own in the process.

**Urmī – Akka:**

*The Binding Vine* is notable for its myriad relationships between mothers/mother-figures and daughters/daughter-figures. Of these relationships the one that is struck between Urmī and Akka, Kishore’s step-mother, proves mutually supportive and positive. The relationship is important because it is Akka who introduces Urmī to Mira. As Akka rummages through an old trunk full of books and diaries, a file and an envelope she revives Mira once again. Looking at Mira’s faded photograph, reading one of her poems Akka begins to weep. That night she tells Urmī and Vaana about Mira’s marriage, or rather the obsession of her husband for Mira. When Mira died the obsession shifted to her son Kishore. Akka was brought not so much as a wife but as a caretaker of a motherless child. But Urmī realises that it is not the remembrance of the days past or her discontent with the marriage that brought Akka to tears. She has been steadfast all through her life. It is rather her empathy for Mira which moves her to tears. Mira’s fear as the dreadful betrothal night lurches on catches Akka’s imagination. Probably, it is the mutual understanding that she enjoys with Urmila that makes her closer to her daughter-in-law than her own daughter Vaana. That night she hands over the trunk to Urmila, formally saying, “Take this, it’s Mira’s” (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 48) just as she had handed over Mira’s jewellery earlier. But the subtle difference in attitude is recognised by Urmī. Earlier she had
not mentioned Mira by name, referring to her as 'Kishore's mother'. Now she can
directly communicate with Urmila and Kishore no longer needs to be the
connective link.

Akka's presence, though limited, is yet of great significance. It is
symbolical that Urmila's quest into the life of her mother-in-law is flagged off by her
other mother-in-law, Akka. It is Akka who provides the magic key with which to
unravel Mira. The deep sensibility with which Akka responds to Mira's poems
infects Urmila as well. It is this mutual bond that connects Akka and Urmila. Both
of them can relate to Mira. This feature becomes clear when we see Urmila
referring back to Akka after completing the poems. It is to Akka that Urmila
reveals her decision to publish Mira's poems. The dream of resurrecting Mira is
shared by Akka as well. She goes through the poems all over again and
obliquely gives her consent by arranging for their publication.

The deep understanding between Urmila and Akka comes out from the
mature manner in which the latter deals with Anu's death. When everybody has
gone to bed she raises the matter and says that though Vaana thinks otherwise,
she expected Urmila to behave as normally as possible. Urmila confesses that she
feels it to be a treachery to her daughter if she acts normally. Akka says, "You
can't hold on to your grief that way, you have to let it go. Only then our dead stay
with us" (Deshpande, Binding Vine 155). These words immediately strike a cord
with Urmila who had felt the same conviction during her father's death. As she
had immersed the ashes of her father at Hardwar, she felt the burden of her grief
lightening and the presence of her father beside her.
The relationship between Akka and Urmila is different from the other relationships in the sense that there is no trace of tension in it as is usually experienced in the mother-daughter relationships. But it nevertheless gives us an idea of how greatly comforting such a relationship can be when it is based on mutual understanding and mature behaviour.

Urmila's relationship with her own mother is not so positive or fulfilling and will be explored in a subsequent chapter.

Section IV: Small Remedies

Madhu – Leela:

The bond between Madhu and Leela, in Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies* (2000) shows the enormous potentiality of mother daughter relationship. It is a most perfect relationship with a very mature understanding between the two. The love and mutual adoration in this relationship is simply worth noting. However, Leela is not the biological mother of Madhu, nor does Madhu know her for the better part of her childhood. Leela is the forbidden name in her maternal home. Her involvement in trade union politics and her remarriage to a Christian Doctor, when she turns a widow do not find favour with most of her kith and kin. Her independent nature and her feeling for the labourers keep her for most of her life in Maruti Chawl, a non-descript slum. But whenever anyone comes to depend on her, Leela is there to help. She is the only person who supports the marriage of Madhu's parents and when they are in search of a shelter she puts them in her home.
Having lost her parents Madhu has no one except Leela to turn to. Leela accepts her graciously by becoming a surrogate-mother to the orphan child. That the relationship between Madhu and Leela is something special becomes evident when we find Hari insisting to know about the public facet of Leela's life while Madhu has nothing to offer him except the private life of the remarkable lady. To Madhu Leela was not so much an activist or leader as a friendly presence in her life.

When Madhu loses her father, Leela was staying with her second husband Joe. Leela keeps a very low profile at Joe's because of the presence of his sister Paula who is in no way favourable to her. Leela tries to help Madhu in her crisis but when she understands that Paula is in no mood to accept Madhu she assists her to settle in a hostel. Herself being fiercely independent in nature she in no way wants Madhu to live as an inferior. However, she does not hold any grudge against Paula, as she realises how difficult the situation has been for her. She rather praises Madhu for not revealing her problems regarding adjusting to Paula as she feels then it would have been a problem for her not to pass it over to Joe. She looks at the whole episode quite humorously, "My poor Joe", she bursts out laughing, "I was remembering him saying – it's good for the girls to be together. I'm glad Paula will have Madhu's company. Oh, my poor stupid Joe” (Deshpande, Small Remedies 121).

Leela's tryst with Madhu continues for a while after she loses her husband, Joe. Leela seems to be comfortable with Madhu particularly with her little son, Adit. However, soon she joins the political bandwagon during the Emergency.
She is put behind the bars. Madhu visits her in prison as per instructions from anonymous callers. But she becomes afraid of the matter; she does not want herself to be labelled as a political activist and hurt her son's interest in any way. The day she passes on a note to Leela in prison, Leela asks her not to do such a thing again. Leela has seen through Madhu's deception. Madhu has a sense that she is cheating Leela, but her concern for her son does not allow her to do otherwise.

Selfishness has entered me, but it's only when I'm afraid for myself the time I visit Leela in prison, the day I pass her the note, that I become conscious of it. Leela's stern 'Don't do this again' pierces through my armour of self-deception; she's looked into me, she's seen my cowardice, my real fear.... What about Adit if something happens to Som, to both of us? (Deshpande, Small Remedies 151)

A more intimate and fulfilling phase of the relationship opens up when Leela is diagnosed of cancer. In spite of the suffering this involves the intimacy and vibrancy of the relationship between Leela and Madhu that comes to the fore during the crisis. When the lump in her breast is diagnosed to be cancerous Leela agrees to undergo a surgery but asks Madhu not to make her undergo any further treatment. The very fact that Madhu agrees to her proposal shows the deep connection between them. Leela agrees to go through the surgery as Madhu and Som would feel guilty if they cannot do anything for their aunt. But at the same time, in spite of her sufferings Madhu agrees not to trouble Leela after
that as a prolonged life can only hurt Leela. The aunt and the niece share a very intimate bond between them at the moment; however, the only thing separating them is the unbridgeable chasm between life and death. But even that gulf is overcome once Madhu can express herself freely.

... But my grief has not left me. I lose control and resting my head on the bed begin to sob, all the grief I've repressed through the months since I knew she was dying, pouring out of me. The tears are for her suffering, her impending death, for my helplessness and my terror at the thought of losing her. When finally I wipe my tears, and hers as well, we are both relieved. And lighter. We've crossed the hurdle of fear -- the fear of death, of parting, of loss. We've accepted all these things. We are together after this, sharing the experience of her dying. I can come to terms with her death, because I am part of it. I know now that it helps (Deshpande, Small Remedies 232-233).

Leela begins to narrate her life story to Madhu telling her how she misses Joe. After the death of her first husband, Vasant she was frightened of widowhood but never really felt lonely. Once her husband died her father comes to take her but she refuses. There is some possible altercation between the two and the connection with her family ends for ever. Though Madhu insists her not to talk too much Leela cannot do without it. In fact she feels lively when she speaks to her niece. This is the period when Leela can completely trust and depend on Madhu. The role has now reversed. The daughter assumes the
mother's role. It is Madhu who is the caretaker instead of Leela. The growing trust between the two is self evident.

...Her hair is now short. She made me cut it, gave herself to my hands with confidence, as if I was a professional hairstylist. I did it fearfully, but when it was over we were both pleased. Leela looked different, her small head elegantly poised on her neck, the bones of her face standing out clear and sharp. She was pleased too. It feels light now, she said. It's good to travel light, she says (Deshpande, Small Remedies 233).

However, Leela's parting shot to Madhu is something none of them expected. Leela narrates to her how she was invited by her mother after a gap of thirty years. Once she goes there she finds herself quite unwelcome; she does not really understand why her mother has summoned her. On the last day of her stay she is given a pack of amla, the first sign of her mother softening to her. But beside the little pack the old lady has something more to offer to her eldest daughter – a secret she has withheld for her life – that Leela has a brother, a son of her father but not the son of her mother. Leela knows that this brother of hers was a sculptor who later committed suicide. To Madhu this message has an enormous effect. She comes to know later that this is the very man who seduced her when she was fifteen. She confesses it to her husband Som when the truth is revealed to her in a nightmare and her married life is ruined. Although Leela, by imparting the secret information to Madhu, proves unwittingly instrumental behind her marital tragedy, still Leela is the one to provide Madhu with the support of a
nurturing mother. It is no wonder that Madhu thinks, "With Leela in my life, I've never felt the lack of a mother" (Deshpande, Small Remedies 151).

The relationships between daughters/daughter-figures and mothers/mother-figures thus examined in this chapter show a level of understanding and fulfilment which is uncommon in mother daughter relationships. Yet, these relations stand out for the bonhomie between the characters concerned. This deep feeling arises out of a thoughtful consideration for each other. The distance between the characters allows a free space in which each can live out her own life. One may be considerate to the other and yet remain free from any constriction. A primary reason behind the problematic relations between a mother and a daughter is according to Beauvoir the powerful identification between the two. The daughter by becoming her mother's 'double' threatens the latter's social and psychic condition. In the case of the distant figures this threat is missing both due to the lack of physical similarity between the two as well as the absence of total emotional identification. So these ties generally prove to be more mature in nature. It would however, be wrong to interpret that there can be no difference between the mother and the daughter figures in such cases. Differences do persist, but they never take the form of open hostility and hatred as sometimes seen in case of real/biological mothers and daughters. In short, these relationships bring out the true potentialities of the mother-daughter relationship if and when it can be free from the psychic subversions.
Notes:

1. Gudiya, a common name for little girls in India, means doll. The name appears to be symbolically significant as the protagonist appears as a vulnerable being, where she can be the plaything of one and all. It is no wonder that she hates the name and prefers to call herself with something grand like Puja Abhimanyu Singh. It is part of Gudiya’s attempt to control her own destiny and create a story of her own.

2. In this novel, as well as many subsequent ones discussed in this thesis, the mothers and the mother-figures are often unnamed. This seems to follow the social practice of identifying mothers with respect to their children rather than recognising them as individual beings.

3. The protagonist in *The Thousand Faces of Night* is named Devi, meaning goddess. Her mother, Sita, is also named after one of the greatest mythological figures valorised for her dedication to her husband. These names again seem to bind these women to socially predefined roles, the escape from which becomes the goal of their lives.

4. The image of the story-telling grandmother in *The Thousand faces of Night* is quite akin to those portrayed in *Things Fall Apart* and *Thākurmār Jhuli*. However, in Hariharan’s novel the grandmother is a lonely figure narrating her stories to her only grandchild, during the vacation-months. The grandmothers in the two other references are traditional matriarchs, who exercise quite a control over their families.