In the act of love, she finds herself more or less expanded, more or less deeply touched, more or less unfolded in her desire of the moment (Irigaray 1993: 65).

The forms of fiction that emerged during the time of nationalism gave a literary dimension to the idea of the nation as the narrative imagination forged a new identity for the nation. Timothy Brennan says that the rise of the modern nation-state in Europe in the late eighteenth century is inseparable from the forms and subjects of imaginative literature. He asserts that nations are "imaginative constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role" (Brennan 1990:48). Brennan comments in the context of European nationalism that the rise of nationalism coincides, especially, with one form of literature, the novel (Brennan 1990:40). In the context of Indian nationalism, the novel also played an important role in the emergence of the nation. The trope of the mother came to be represented in several forms in the novels. Thus in the invention of the nation as a form of fiction women were assigned the symbolic roles of the "mother of the nation". Against the narratives of the nation which this genre addressed, women wrote their own narratives in the fictional form as its relative impersonality gave woman a space to reveal her self. Women's fictional writings differ from the corpus of fictional writings written by men during the later half of the nineteenth century. This was a space where a woman could speak for herself - a privilege that was denied to her in man's fiction which appropriated her roles. Here she could self consciously explore or implicitly
expose the contradictions of prevailing versions of femininity and create new styles and modes through which to articulate her own specific sense of the feminine. Among the women fiction writers who wrote in the later half of the nineteenth century were Toru Dutt (1856-1877) who wrote in English and French and Swarnakumari Devi (1856-1932), and Krupa Satthianadan (1861-1894) who wrote in English. Women’s fictions articulate diverse voices which express women’s own experiences through the mask of a character. Swarnakumari Devi’s fiction *Kahake* or *To Whom?* unfolds the significance of love for a woman. A sense of confidence marks her fictions as the fictional form gave her various opportunities to unveil her self. She writes in the first chapter of *Kahake*:

However far I look back into the past, ever since knowledge dawned on me, it would seem, all I have done is to love. Love and life are synonymous for me. If I detach love from myself, life becomes empty and without substance – I lose my own selfhood (Devi, Swama Kumari 1991:239).

She reveals through the fictional form that love forms an indispensable part of her life. For a woman, love is inextricably related with her life and fiction helped her to articulate her feeling of love.

The fictions of Toru Dutt reveal her longing for love and desire that she was unable to express through the other genres. Luce Irigaray states in “Love of Self” that women want to find themselves and discover their own identity in love:

Tradition places her within the home, sheltered in the home. But that home, which is usually paid for by man’s labor ...encloses her, places her in internal exile unless she is able, in some other way, to take on the envelop of her “own desire,” the garb of her “own” jouissance, of her “own” love (Irigaray 1993:65).
The symbolic representations of woman enclose her in an "interal exile" and it is only in unraveling her self, especially in fiction, which offers her considerable freedom, that she is able to unveil the "garb of her own jouissance". The fictional world helped her to cross the limits of the social strictures, and this we see in the case of Toru Dutt, who was able to express her own desires in fiction. Although the expression of her desires is very much restricted, compared to the explicit expressions of sexual desire in the twentieth century woman novelist, yet, in the history of Indian English women's fictions, Toru Dutt's novels can be regarded as the first step in woman's revelation of female desire.

Women's fictions subvert the cultural symbols of the nationalist discourse to reveal an authentic self. The image of the mother limits her to a 'thing' and therefore she finds herself delineated as a thing (Irigaray 1993:10). If this "dialectics of the master and the slave" is applied to the nationalist discourse, it becomes evident that this discourse annihilates women's own female experience as it "defines and determines her being". In fiction, women have re-interpreted these images of the woman and the mother to give expression to their own selves and thereby disturb the limits and perspectives of the discourse.

Toru Dutt's two novels, Bianca and Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers are expressions of her female desires – her sexual, maternal and other frustrated desires which she could not realize in her real life in a society which set limits and kept strict surveillance on her movements. Women in the nineteenth century were positioned in their pre-ordained social roles as – daughter, wife, and mother – within the restrictions of an inherited patriarchal circuit. The sculpting of a new respectability for women through the imposition of new cultural norms was taken up
by what Partha Chatterjee calls the “new patriarchy” (Chatterjee *The Nation and its Fragments* 1999:130). A similar redefinition of sexual mores for women had taken place in Europe during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as the new bourgeoisie inscribed its identity on the bodies of women and the ‘proper lady’ was born. Toru Dutt’s anglophile father inculcated the ‘virtues’ of Victorian morality which set a restraint on her manners and movements. Her photograph, taken when she was seventeen, in a flowing gown—buttoned up to her neck and covering her ankles reflects the controls on her dress.4 Fiction offered her a subversive way to go against these repressive structures. This might be the possible reasons for hiding her fictions from her father who had been supportive in all her other enterprises.

Although the exact dates are not known, *Bianca* and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers* were secretly written by Toru Dutt after her return from England and France to India, i.e. between 1874 and her premature death in 1877. However, there is not even the slightest mention of these novels in her letters which she wrote to Mary Martin. It was only after her death that Toru Dutt’s father, Govin Chunder Dutt, discovered the manuscripts of her two fictions. When he discovered the manuscript of the French fiction *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers*, he copied it and sent it to the French historian, Clarissa Bader for publication. The other manuscript in English, *Bianca* or *The Young Spanish Maiden*, was never published as a book, but Govin Chunder Dutt had arranged for its publication in the local Calcutta journal, *The Bengali Magazine*, where it appeared in serial form in 1878. *Bianca* was never published as a book and few knew of its existence in the pages of a forgotten Calcutta journal. The novel remained incomplete, (unfinished
at the time of the young author's death). As Govin Chunder Dutt had written in the *Bengali Magazine*, April, 1878:

The gentle hands that had traced the story thus far, — the hands of Miss Toru Dutt, — left off here. Was it illness that made the pen drop from the weary fingers? I do not know, I think not. The sketch was a first attempt probably, and abandoned. I am inclined to think so because the novel left in the French language is very much superior indeed to this fragment and is complete.\(^5\)

Toru Dutt was influenced by nineteenth century women writers like Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters.\(^6\) She also borrowed some of the elements of the gothic in her fiction *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* from her reading of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Emile Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Gothic forms were employed by women sensationalist novelists to subvert rational codes of understanding and reason through their engagement with fanciful ideas and imaginative flights (Botting 1996: 3). Toru Dutt had used the spatial model of the gothic in presenting the Plouarven castle in her novel *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*.

Both *Bianca* and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* are important texts for unraveling the female self. *Bianca* is the first novel to be written in Indian English by a woman. Both the novels can be read as masked autobiographies through which Toru Dutt obliquely expresses her female experiences. This chapter will discuss Toru Dutt's repressed erotic desires in these two novels. It will make an attempt to examine the different ways in which Dutt reveals her suppressed female desires in both novels through the characters of Bianca and Marguerite. As evidence
of Toru Dutt's repressed desires, it will unravel these aspects in the two novels under the following heads:

(1) The experiences of sexual and maternal desires.

(2) A revelation of female sexuality through mimicry.

(3) The failed loves and sad endings in the two novels.

(4) The outdoor activities in both the novels that serve as compensation for the very real social restraints.

(5) The experience of female friendships that are cut short by adverse situations.

The fictionalized characters placed in alien settings help Toru Dutt in revealing her own experiences of love and desire in a world which set severe limits on her. She reveals her desires through the characters of Bianca and Marguerite, the heroines of her two novels, who articulate their first experience of love as young girls and the turmoil involved in their acts of transgression. The fictional locale helped Toru Dutt in distancing herself from the written text as both the novels were set outside India and peopled completely by European characters. Although there is no explicit hint of Toru Dutt's having any romantic relationship with a man during her sojourn in Europe, the only reference in the letters, that might possibly point towards her attraction for a man, is that of her French teacher, M. Boquel, who used to deliver the French lectures when she attended the High lectures for women at Cambridge, during her stay in England (Das: Dec 13, 1875, 118). Her fictional writings make it apparent that she possessed and fancied a romantic relationship.

In the fictional form a woman could write as she wished, speak of her own desires and love and thereby in the process "construct a history in a feminine
mode”. A female mode of identity which is inseparable from her body is what is reflected in Toru Dutt’s two fictions. Her sexual and maternal desires find an echo in both her novels. Toru Dutt articulates her arousal of sexual desire as a young girl through the experience of Bianca in a society which set regulations on her conduct. The first stirrings of love that Toru Dutt might have felt as a young girl also form the theme of her French novel *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers*. Written in the form of a fictional diary, Toru Dutt gives expression to her the desire for love, conjugal life and motherhood in the character of her heroine Marguerite in *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers*.

In *Bianca*, Toru Dutt gives expression to her female desires through the character of Bianca who reveals her sexuality against the social codes of conduct. Bianca’s ecstasy at her first experience of kissing and the consequences thereafter forms an important aspect in the novel. The ‘strange feeling’ of pleasure which Bianca enjoys after Lord Moore kisses her on the mouth is articulated clearly in the novel. This act of sexual transgression is severely opposed by her father.

The character of Bianca with her long hair and large eyes bear similarities with Toru Dutt. Her description of Bianca shows a distinct resemblance to herself: “She was not beautiful; of the middle height; her slight figure was very graceful ... her eyes were large and full; in fact this pair of eyes and her long, black curls were her only points of beauty” (*Bianca* 93).

Toru Dutt’s father, Govin Chunder Dutt is represented in the character of Alonzo Garcia, the authoritarian father, who despite allowing his daughter to pursue all her creative interests could not cross the limits of social decorum. Bianca, the protagonist, who seems to be a projection of Toru Dutt is partly Spanish and partly
British. As Lady Moore says, she is a “dark beauty, dark as a gypsy” (Bianca 102). Like Toru Dutt, Bianca is also fond of poetry and she is placed at the interface of two different cultures. The exposure to western culture and freedom in her four year sojourn in England, the social norms that had to be maintained in her Calcutta home and the family’s conversion into Christianity are some of the cultural displacements that Toru Dutt had to struggle with and these are objectified in the character of Bianca who also had to struggle with competing allegiances. Bianca’s controls on her female self are seen in the restrictions being imposed on her by her father. The restrictions on her self are close to those on Toru Dutt’s life as she was not allowed to go outside the limits of her own garden.

The novel commences with the funeral of Bianca’s sister, Inez, who bears close resemblance to Aru, Toru Dut’s sister who predeceased her. As Toru Dutt consoles herself in real life so also Bianca seeks solace in Christianity at her sister Inez’s untimely death. Bianca controls her emotions even at this crucial moment as she does not let her father see her tears. An unusual sense of self restraint and self possession mark her outward self: When the coffin of her sister, Inez is laid to rest, Bianca resists her tears in front of her father lest they are seen by her father. It is only when she is alone in her bedroom that she releases her emotions openly. Next morning, before she leaves her room she wipes her tears as she says to herself, “father must not see that I have cried” (Bianca 95). The fear of being constantly watched by her father haunts her. This reflects Toru Dutt’s own adherence to social decorum. Although her father had supported her intellectual progress, he too was not free from the social moorings. There was the constant suffocation of adhering to the social norms which was painful for Toru Dutt especially after enjoying a free life in
England. The repressed sexual desires find expression from time to time in spite of the social taboos. This is seen in Bianca’s uninhibited revelation of her desires when she is in the presence of Lord Moore. While in the presence of Garcia she exercises control over her self, in Lord Moore’s presence she reveals her feeling of love although in an oblique way. Even in Lord Moore’s presence, she maintains all the propriety of the ‘feminine’:

She loved him with all the fire and glow of her warm southern blood. Did he love her? She never asked the question to herself, she never thought of it. Sometimes a word from him would make her believe so, and then the red blood would send a dark flush on her olive cheek, a bright flash would come into her brown eyes, but she never let herself be deceived; a minute, a second, the cheek would glow and then become pale as usual (Bianca 103).

Bianca had no opportunities to make her own choices – all her activities had to be approved by her father. When Lord Moore tells her that he would like to hear her read verses, she looks at her father for approval. It is only after he nods in assent that she talks to Lord Moore. Here again there is the fear of hurting her father: “Bianca had a slight qualm of conscience; would her father like to see her thus talking all alone for any length of time with Lord Moore” (Bianca 107).

When little Will with his childish playfulness drops Bianca’s hair pin, her beautiful hair falls much to the admiration of Lord Moore. Seeing his reaction her father, Garcia sternly instructs his daughter to bind her hair. Bianca could feel the harshness in her father’s tone which hurt her and almost brought tears of wounded pride to her eyes: “She knew that he thought she was playing a little of the coquette before Lord Moore” (Bianca 107).
Bianca’s self is in constant conflict with two loyalties. On the one hand there was her father, who stood for social decorum and on the other hand there was Lord Moore whom she loved and desired. Bianca temporarily frees herself from restraint and succumbs to emotion when Bianca enjoys the “utterable bliss” of Lord Moore’s kiss (Bianca 108).

After being “kissed on the mouth” by Lord Moore, an unusual boldness fills her and she confesses her desires fearlessly in front of her father: “a strange feeling of utterable bliss mingled with pain” comes upon her. She takes pleasure in the incident:

‘Oh, if he kissed me again!’ She felt as if she had drunk of the heavenly hydrom of the poets, she wanted to take a deeper draught of the drinks of the gods. She had never been kissed by a man... How strange, how soul thrilling that touch of his lips was. It sent all the dark blood rushing to her olive cheeks and forehead (Bianca 108).

Although thrilled by this passion, Bianca feels she must report the “impropriety” to her father. When Garcia scornfully tells her that she had been insulted, Bianca bravely retorts, “father; he did not insult me!” (Bianca 109). With fire in her eyes she for the first time speaks of her individual choice to her father thus, “Father, I did not think it was wrong; he loves me so and I — love him too” (Bianca 109). A feeling of momentary pleasure sent “the blood tingling to her cheeks” when she held the letter which conveyed Lord Moore’s proposal to marry her. When Garcia objects to Bianca’s marriage with Lord Moore on account of their social disparity, Bianca asserts herself, “Oh father let not money stand in between me and my happiness” (Bianca 110).
Through the voice of Bianca, Toru Dutt challenges the social decorum which restricted the expression of female desire. Yet, she could not disregard the social bonds. Sensing her father’s possessiveness toward her, as she was the only surviving child, Bianca makes a docile submission, “I will not marry him. I wish your peace and happiness above all things” (Bianca 110). Bianca submits her womanly desires before her father, who represents the cultural and social restraints. The repression of her feeling weighs heavily on her as she suffers from a mental breakdown immediately after this turmoil.

The last part of Bianca which depicts a mental breakdown or a state of hysteria in Bianca, proceeds from the suffocations felt by Toru Dutt in a society which kept a vigil on her movements. Hysteria is associated with imitation and especially imitation of traditional signs of femininity which make women hide or disavow their erotic impulses. Connecting hysteria to mimicry, Irigaray wonders that what paths other than mimicry are open to women, “How could she be anything but suggestible and hysterical when her sexual drives have been castrated, her sexual feelings, representatives and representations forbidden?” (Irigaray 1985:59-60). A deliberate mimicry is a first phase of thwarting the traditional feminine role thus converting a form of subordination into an affirmation. Irigaray states: “To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it” (Irigaray 1985:76). She sees it as an interim strategy for dealing with patriarchal discourses in which the woman deliberately reveals the mechanisms which exploit her. Thus, hysteria becomes a strategy for a woman to experience herself as she is positioned by the desire of the masculine. Bianca’s hysteria emerges from her desire for love and the
need to surrender to the expectations of her father. In her subconscious mind, Bianca struggles for the expression of her desire in a society which restricts her from such individual assertions. Through the incoherent utterances, Toru Dutt shows Bianca’s hesitant efforts to express her sexuality. Irigaray suggests that as women have no language of their own, “hysterical miming will be the little girl’s last efforts to save her sexuality from total repression and destruction” (Irigaray 1985:72).

The maternal instincts of love and care are revealed in the little acts of kindness of her heroines. On her visit to Lady Moore, Bianca plays indulgently with little Will, takes him on her lap, helps him to eat his dinner and puts him to sleep with a song. The little acts are also scenes of wish fulfillment for Toru Dutt finding expression for instance in Bianca’s fondness for little Will:

\[And she rose taking Will gently in her arms. ‘Give him to me, he is too heavy for you,’ said Lord Moore. ‘No thank you. It might awake him,’ answered Bianca. She entered the drawing room, unclasped the little arm from her neck, and as she did so sang or rather murmured unconsciously to herself (Bianca was passionately fond of poetry) some fragments of a song… Then she kissed the rounded cheek of her favourite and laid him gently on a couch and covered him carefully with a shawl (Bianca 102 ).\]

The fictional mask sometimes slips when for example Bianca refers to her brown little hand in his broad white palm as Lord Moore pressed them “in a closer press perhaps, than the occasion warranted”, when he came to leave her in her house (Bianca 104 emphasis added). It is Dutt’s repressive desire which find expression in both her novels.

Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers reveals Toru Dutt’s expression of desire from two perspectives: on the one hand there is Toru Dutt’s unfulfilled passions represented through the intensity of Marguerite’s love for Dunois; on the
other, there is the representation of her repressed desire for conjugal love and motherhood which finds expression in the marriage of Marguerite and Louis. The fictional world provides Marguerite the liberty to choose her own suitor, Count Dunois, whom she loved and desired although Louis was the choice of her parents. Marguerite felt an irresistible attraction for Count Dunois, of the Plouarven castle, while her parents wanted her to marry Louis Lefevre, of the Twenty-second Light Cavalry. Her desire for Dunois is in a contravention of the set of restraints being imposed on her. Marguerite’s bodily response in the presence of Dunois finds expression in her fictional diary. She confides that Dunois was the source of life for her. She writes on November 27, “Talking to him, being close to him, feeling his black eyes on me, breathing the same air as him, that is happiness for me; all my sad thoughts flew away” (The Diary 67). Marguerite expresses the awareness of her body’s desire on seeing Dunois, “It made me go pink with pleasure, and I no longer heard what Mademoiselle Gosserele was saying, or Monsieur Lanc” (The Diary 48). However, Marguerite’s bliss is short-lived as Dunois is arrested for killing his brother, Gaston, and has to face a fifteen-year imprisonment in Touloum. Later Marguerite gets the news that he has killed himself while in prison.

When Louis proposes to Marguerite for the second time, and holds her in his arms the warmth and passion in Marguerite is very different from the passion she feels for Dunois. Her response is similar to that of a person being saved from drowning, “It was the same sense of happiness that had seized me, when one day, I was close to drowning..., my father had dived into the water and taking me in my arms, he had hugged me against his chest” (The Diary 97). However, she slowly reconciles her self and accepts Louis’s proposal of marriage.
Marguerite finds herself drawn to a conjugal life, the anticipation of a happy life with Louis making her feel happy. The sense of touch and the embrace are explicitly presented in the novel:

I like feeling his cheeks brushing against my forehead, his hand pressing mine, my head on his shoulders. We did not talk. Tomorrow we will be united. Twice he kissed me softly on the forehead (The Diary 104).

Toru Dutt expresses Marguerite’s bliss at her attainment of a happy married life. The intimate moments with Louis finds expression in these lines:

I circled my arms around his neck and I pressed my lips on his. He sat down beside me and I placed my head on his chest. He parted the hair on my forehead, for they were half covering it, I pressed myself closer to him, and I lifted my eyes towards him, smiling, happy, confident (The Diary 107).

II

The failed loves in both her novels are a consequence of the frustrations she had to undergo in her short life. Toru Dutt suffered from cultural displacements after her return from England and France. The restraints on her freedom in India made her long for the free life which she had enjoyed in England. On several occasions in her letters written after her return from India, she expresses her wishes to return to England. Toru Dutt’s oscillation between two cultural identities, the free life of England and the restrained life in India made her indulge in flights of fancies which find expression in both her novels. The loss of her two siblings – her brother Abju and sister Aru at a very young age was unbearable for her. This might have resulted in the writing of “Bianca” where the story starts with the death of Bianca’s sister Inez, who represents Aru. In a letter written to Mary Martin on September 20, 1874,
from Manicktollah Street, Calcutta, she confides to her friend the frustrations she and the family had to undergo after the loss of Aru and the plans of the family to return to England:

Aru’s was of such a lively and merry disposition, that she seemed to fill all the large Garden house with life and animation. Now without her, the place is so lifeless and deserted that Mama can hardly bear going there. We are thinking of disposing of it, if we go to England; for if we do go, as we all wish to, again we shall settle there. The free air of Europe, and the free life there, are things not to be had here (Das 1921:67).

Toru Dutt’s suffering from consumption also might explain her fascination for the themes of unfulfilled loves and desires. In a letter written to Mary Martin, on August 28, 1876, Toru Dutt writes to Mary Martin about her painful struggle with her illness, “You see I have been more than a month ill, and I have not been to Church for such a long time; a short drive even tires me” (Das 1921:191).

On March 5, 1877, she writes that she could not write an interesting letter as she had been ill and the cough had been too troublesome. The deteriorating condition of her health and her inability even to write is expressed in another letter written to her friend on July 17, 1877 where she reveals that she had been so weak that she had to be taken downstairs in a chair. Her hair had been cut short and blisters had to be attached under her right collar bone which was very painful (Das 1921:279).

All these feelings of frustration in her life resulted in Toru Dutt’s writing on disappointed love and frustrated desires in her novels. She had also been attracted by the themes of failed love and frustrated desire in Charlotte Bronte’s Villette. As Villette ends with an uncertainty as to whether the lovers will be united, Bianca also
ends with Lord Moore’s separation from Bianca as he had to go to fight in the Crimean war. In *Le Journal Mademoiselle d’Arvers*, Marguerite’s love for Dunois ends in frustration and her conjugal life with Louis comes to a close after a short period of bliss as Marguerite dies after giving birth to a child.

In *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers*, Marguerite falls in love with Count Dunois after her return from the Convent. Her love for Dunois makes her refuse Louis whom her parents select as her suitor. Marguerite was quite unaware of the clandestine love of the two brothers, Dunois and Gaston for their chambermaid, Jeanette. After a brief period of strain between the two brothers, on account of Jeanette, Dunois ends up by shooting Gaston in a fit of jealousy. Even after the shocking revelation of Dunois’s relationship with Jeanette, Marguerite shows sympathy for him. She stays in Plouarven Castle until his trial, to help Dunois recover from the mental breakdown he suffers after shooting his brother. After hearing Dunois’s confession to his mother of his relationship with Jeanette and the murder, Marguerite expresses her feelings thus:

> He had hid his face in his hands and sobbed to break one’s heart; his mother was also crying. I got up and I took Dunois’ hands in mine. I don’t know why I was like a dog, who sees the despair of his master, and who wants to console him and lick his hands. I saw clearly what had happened in the room, but I did not realize it; I was as if in a dream (*The Diary* 88-89).

After the verdict, Dunois leaves his home for fifteen years of life imprisonment. This weighs heavily on the young Marguerite. She becomes completely heart broken and loses her spirit for life itself. She writes with frustration in her diary:
I would have liked to follow him, but all strength had left me, and I felt hollow in my soul. Everything had turned black and dark around me; the light of my life was snuffed out. I was scared, like a child left without light and in the dark. I pressed myself against his mother, Oh Lord, help me and have pity on me! (The Diary 90-91).

The theme of unfulfilled love is also implicit in the sixteenth century story of the Plouarven Castle narrated by its last descendent, Dunois to Marguerite. Dunois leads Marguerite down an underground passage in the castle where he shows her the portrait of Dame Catherine who died of frustrated love. Dunois tells her the romantic story of Catherine, the daughter of one of his ancestors, who died of frustrated love. Catherine had been in love with a young man who visited the castle:

The young girl loved him from the first moment... Her gentle and innocent body coloured up at the smallest compliment he paid her (The Diary 39).

Marguerite identifies with Catherine in the story who died of love as the young man had left the castle. This story of frustrated love is a foreshadowing of the theme of failed relationships in the novel.

Marguerite’s frustrations in her relationship with Dunois tell on her health, and she suffers from delirium and fever. It is only after a long period of illness that she is able to recover. She writes in her diary on April 10, 1861:

It had been a long time since I wrote in my diary. I have just got up from a serious illness. I had fever and was in delirium. They had no longer any hope of saving me. But God is good. When I opened my eyes, and I saw the sun, the blue sky, and especially the happy faces of my father and mother, I blessed God (The Diary 91).

The entry in Marguerite’s diary dated April 20, 1861, where she writes about her health is similar to Toru Dutt’s letter written to Mary Martin on July 17, 1877.
Marguerite writes: “I wanted to walk down, but after a few steps, I had to sit down”. Then her father exclaimed: “I am to carry you, little one, you are too weak!” (The Diary 93).

The second section of the novel celebrates Marguerite’s marriage with Louis, the young military officer who had proposed to her earlier and had been the choice of her parents. Marguerite accepts Louis as her husband to oblige her parents. Marguerite finds happiness in her marriage with Louis but Toru Dutt shows that Marguerite’s state of bliss is short-lived. For all the pleasures of a happy conjugal life and the bliss at Marguerite’s prospects of motherhood, there is a premonition of death which casts a shadow on Marguerite’s happiness. As, in the earlier section, in this section also, Toru Dutt uses the technique of foreshadowing to predict the future. On the day of her marriage with Louis on May 14, 1861, Marguerite feels a premonition of death while coming out of the Church, “When we came out of the church, people threw flowers on our path. A verse suddenly comes to my mind, I had read it somewhere”:

All the paths would flower,
For the beautiful bride is going to come out;
Would flower, would sprout,
For the beautiful bride will pass by!
All the paths would moan
For the beautiful dead lady is going to come out,
Would wail, would wail.
For the beautiful dead lady will pass by! (The Diary 105).

This verse casts a spell of frustration over Marguerite’s thoughts. She hears this verse or the ‘jasmine song’ again when Monsieur Viart, a friend of Louis sings it in the woods. A feeling of frustration overcomes her when she hears it:
I felt my heart contract; I took my husband’s hand and held it in mine. Like him, I am happy, my God, so happy. And the little one who is to come? Will I not be there to nurse him, to bring him up and to guide his first footsteps? *(The Diary 117)*.

An atmosphere of foreboding surrounds the entire section. Toru Dutt shows how Marguerite’s happiness is continuously disturbed by her bad dreams. On January 11, 1861 Marguerite writes in her journal about her sad dreams which cast a gloom on her thought.

The sheer pleasure that Marguerite enjoys at her attainment of motherhood expresses Toru Dutt’s own fantasies. In the midst of all the happiness, the “refrain of the jasmine song” rings in her ears and Marguerite feels her happiness interrupted. While planning with Louis that she would be happy to deliver her baby at Brittany, in her parents home, the echo of the song cuts short her feelings of joy at the prospect of motherhood. The feeling of losing her happiness also finds expression in her dreams which predicts the failure of her hopes and desires. In her dream she sees the face of death engraved on Louis’s face. She narrates the dream to Louis:

[I] lifted my face toward you, and then you turned your head and looked at me. My God! It was hardly your face, it was the face of Death, and on that I woke up *(The Diary 131)*.

Looking at the dead leaves that had fallen from the trees, Marguerite feels a sense of despair as she says: “Suddenly I said, Louis, when the trees will flower again, I will no longer be there; I will be lying under the cold grass” *(The Diary 130)*.

Toru Dutt’s unfulfilled desire for motherhood finds expression in the brief period of bliss which Marguerite attains after giving birth to the baby. Marguerite’s joy at her attainment of motherhood is interrupted by her death, only a day after
giving birth to the baby. After Louis places the baby on his wife's bosom she kisses the baby for the last time: "She looked at him for a long time; an ineffable smile came to her lips. She kissed the forehead of the little one as one kisses a relic" (*The Diary* 134).

Marguerite's experience of breast feeding her child is narrated in the epilogue. The happiness and pride at her new experience of motherhood is reflected in these lines:

The baby suckled; the young mother looked at him, happy and proud, an inexpresseible joy made the blood mount her cheeks, when for the first time she felt her baby press her breast, her husband seated beside her, his hand on the shoulders of his young wife, contemplating her happiness, smiling. At last the baby went to sleep, his rosy mouth wet and white with milk let go of the breast (*The Diary* 136).

However, this experience is also very brief as the doctor advises her to engage a wet nurse until she recovers from her fever. As she gets ready to nurse her child, Louis prevents her as per the instructions of the doctor:

Don't feed him, dear child
She looked at him with astonishment, and a little fear.
Why not? She asked.
You have a little fever, dear friend... (*The Diary* 142).

Through the frustrations of Marguerite's life, Toru Dutt seems to suggest the tragic realities of her own life. In a letter written to Mary Martin on May 3, 1876 she writes of the tragic and lonely life of the Bronte sisters:

To think of those three young sisters in that old parsonage, among the lonely wild moors of Yorkshire, all three so full of talent, and yet amidst those living Yorkshire worlds... How sad their history is! How dreary for
the father to see one by one all her children die, and to live on alone and
infirm, in that solitary parsonage in Yorkshire! In truth there is no greater
tragedy in fiction than what happens in our real, daily life (Das 1921:153).

In her novel *Bianca* the marriage between Lord Moore and Bianca does not
take place. *Bianca* (even if incomplete as Govin Chunder had reported) ends with
Lord Moore’s going to Sevastopol as the Crimean war had broken:

The Crimean war had broken out and England required her sons to do their
duty. Lord Moore was a captain in the — regiment[sic] and he was leaving
England for Sevastapool. It was their last day. He was sitting beside her in
the garden covered with dead leaves. She held his hand in her small brown
one, firmly, tenderly; her eyes fixed on Lord Moore’s face. Every lineament
of that dear face was being engraved in her heart. He must go, but the
parting was hard, very hard. Presently he took off a small ring from his
watch guard, and slid it on her marriage finger. You will wear that for my
sake darling, and if I never return’ — Her downcast eyelids quivered...
(*Bianca* 124-125).

The passionate parting scene between Lord Moore and Bianca suggests
some kind of a failed relationship in Toru Dutt’s life. The nineteenth century social
setting of Bengal did not allow her any scope for pursuing a romantic relationship.
The separation of the two lovers in *Bianca* suggests little chance of a re-union.
Although declared as incomplete by her father, the parting scene suggests that there
could not have been any further developments in the novel. It is the memory of love
which Toru Dutt treasures in her novel as when Bianca on her parting from Lord
Moore ‘engraved’ ‘every lineament of that dear face in her heart’. Here once again it
is Toru Dutt’s self which reveals itself when she talks of Bianca’s small brown hand
being held by Lord Moore.
III

The references to the many outdoor activities in the two novels, especially in *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* are an expression of Toru Dutt's wish to be liberated from the actual constraints of her own life. As evident in her letters to Mary Martin, Toru Dutt's freedom of movement was restricted by a society which kept vigilance on her movements. She had to remain within the limits of her own garden according to contemporary social strictures. After coming to India from her four year sojourn in Europe, Toru Dutt writes about missing a free life in England. In her letter written on May 11, 1874 she refers to her free life in England:

> We all want so much to return to England. We miss the free life we led there; here we can hardly go out of the limits of our own Garden, but Baugmaree happily is a pretty big place, and we walk round our own park as much as we like (Das 1921: 63-64).

The outdoor space, an expression of liberation for women, plays a significant part in unfolding Toru Dutt's female self and it is an aspect of *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*. The openness of the outdoor space gave a sense of confidence to Toru. Her fascination for outdoor activities and the restrictions imposed on her movements are reflected in her letter to Mary Martin dated October 31, 1876, where she reveals to Mary Martin that it was considered unladylike, immodest to walk in the street on foot. It was only the garden space in her house in Baugmaree that provided her compensation as here she could do whatever she liked “without fear of any peering and scandalized neighbour staring in surprise and contempt at her ‘strange man-like ways’” (Das 1921:233).

In *Le Journal Mademoiselle d'Arvers*, Toru Dutt's French heroine Marguerite participates in various outdoor activities and obviously gives her author a vicarious
sense of participation. The outdoor activities – the walks, the horse ridings, and the picnics serve to act as a counterpoint to the constricted real state of Toru Dutt’s life at home. Toru Dutt uses the outdoor space to show how this space was important for the growth of Marguerite’s female self. It helps to reveal two aspects of her self:

1. It gives confidence to Marguerite to express her female desires.

2. It makes her participate in the life of the community.

The rapturous sense of freedom that she enjoys in the outdoor space and the sense of inhibition that accompanies it reveals itself when Marguerite suddenly sees Dunois and his brother in the woods. This is the first time that Marguerite sees the Count in the outdoors. Here she feels safer with her father than in the presence of the Count:

I was eating blackberries and wild berries whose juice had coloured my lips. Suddenly, we heard the sound of hooves, and the count and his brother appeared before us. I would have liked to run away as, with my hair disheveled and my violet lips, I was not fit to be seen. Papa held me by the arm... *(The Diary 24-25).*

The next encounter of Marguerite with Dunois in the woods increases her confidence, as she feels more secure in his presence. The sublimity of the landscape helps her to develop an affinity for Dunois:

The count made me admire the countryside rolling out in front of us. The bleak and sad castle was at that moment bathed in the bright red rays of the setting sun behind the big edifice. We crossed a big meadow; all around were fields of barley and oats thriving in the sun *(The Diary 33).*

The use of the “we” and the “us” show how she was able to identify her self with Dunois in the presence of the landscape. This repetition of the “we” is again
used when she recounts her wonderful experience of horse riding with Count Dunois. The morning took on a new freshness for her when he rode close to her. The outdoor space helps in establishing an intimacy with him:

We trotted off but after a few minutes, we galloped. The count rode close to me in case of any accident. The morning was so fresh, the sky so blue, and I was so happy! (The Diary 36).

In her next meeting when Marguerite goes with Dunois on a boat, her love for him is reflected on her face, and in her concern for him when he was about to slip accidentally into the river from the boat. Marguerite writes of this experience of boat riding in a diary entry dated September 9, 1860:

The count, his brother and I sailed gaily between the two banks of bramble and eglantine. The countryside was so gentle and charming! In the distance we could see, over the top of the trees, the tall tower of the castle. Everything was quiet around us; we could only hear our own voices (The Diary 36).

On her next meeting with the Count in the Picnic at Rosewoods she is able to express her desires more directly without inhibitions. When Dunois arrives late for the picnic and enquires about her, it made her “go pink with pleasure” and she “no longer heard what Mademoiselle was saying nor Monsiur Lanc” (48).

Toru Dutt shows Marguerite’s participation in various outdoor activities. These activities are an expansion of a woman’s traditional roles of nurture and care where she participates in the welfare of the community. In Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers, Marguerite makes regular visits to the houses of the poor people in the community. Dunois’s mother, the Countess of Plouarven, appreciates her role as she says, “You have hardly been here a month in our midst, and you
already know all the poor people" (31). Marguerite knows the villagers by their names and often visits them. On August 23, 1860 Marguerite writes about her experience of visiting the old people in the village and her visit to the poverty stricken family of Andre Corraine.

Marguerite’s other activities include the little acts of kindness for the poor people of the villages. On August 24,1860, Marguerite writes of her second visit to the Corraine family when finding Jeannette boiling some meager soup, she puts in a piece of bacon and a cauliflower which she had in her box (2005:26). On September 26, Marguerite refers to her visit to the Volpoines, the village school master and his wife. She refers and mentions the little details of their lives:

My mother and I visited the school master. They live on the bank of the river. The husband earns some hundred and sixty francs per year, and his wife looks after the house and his children. They have three children: the eldest, a fat boy of eight, looks well and follows his father around everywhere. After him, there is a charming young girl of six, Helene, who adores her Helene, who adores her brother Claude and looks upon him as her protector (The Diary 46).

On November 22,1860, Marguerite writes how she was able to be of some help to the Volpoines when she helped their little child Pierre, to recover from sickness. Marguerite immediately rushes to the Volpoines when she is informed by little Helen about her brother Pierre’s sickness. She takes the little child in her arms and gives it a hot bath:

I knew no remedy for children’s illness, but I had heard my mother say that a hot water bath did them a lot of good when they had convulsions. I therefore bathed him, praying to God to cure him. When I had dried him
with hot linen, he opened his eyes. I gave him a spoon of hot milk and he drank it (The Diary 59).

All these outdoor activities are extensions of a woman’s need to ‘care’ and ‘share’. Living a restrained life, Toru Dutt could not participate in these acts of ‘caring’ and ‘sharing’ outside her home. It is in the character of Marguerite that she vicariously fulfills these roles.

IV

Woman’s fiction tend to subvert the traditional heterosexual relationships. It focuses on the body — ways of loving and desiring being keys to the female self. As against the gender roles of woman as a daughter, wife and mother which are a part of the hegemonic discourse, women have reconceived these roles. Within the conceptual framework of male discourse, female desire for another female self cannot be recognized. However, Toru Dutt has given expression to this relationship of female friendship in her novel. However, considering the social restraints, it is not allowed to develop. Yet the strong feeling of support that a woman can get from another woman finds full expression in her novel.

In the fictional diary of Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers, Toru Dutt presents a little instance of female friendship in Marguerite’s relationship with Sister Veronique at the convent. Such bonding and friendship, which exceeds the stereotypical roles of the wife, mother and daughter, was not given a chance to develop by society. Toru Dutt’s regular correspondence helped develop her friendship with Mary Martin. However, her desire to meet her friend Mary Martin again does not materialize, even if she keeps alive the relationship through the numerous epistolary exchanges.
The bonding between Marguerite and Veronique in *Le Journal de Mademoiselle D'Arvers* is cut short by the latter's premature death. Even after her death, Sister Veronique continues to be a source of strength and inspiration for Marguerite. The novel begins with Marguerite’s leaving the convent where she spent many happy years. Friendship between Marguerite and Sister Veronique covers a short period of two years; it develops during Marguerite’s stay at the convent and breaks after her leaving the convent for her home. It was the act of sharing each other’s feelings which was important in the relationship. Marguerite writes on September 30 after visiting the vault where Sister Veronique was laid to rest:

She used to love to talk so much of her family to me! She confided in me her anguish, her pain (*The Diary* 49).

This sense of caring and sharing in the relationship of friendship is explicitly presented in Marguerite’s relationship with Sister Veronique. A woman could confide her feelings to a friend in a way that was not possible in the other relationships that women were sanctioned to have. Here Toru Dutt focuses on this unconventional role, the companionship shared by one woman for another.

The intimacy and affection Marguerite received from all the sisters in the convent is nostalgically presented in the lines that Marguerite writes in her first diary entry on August 20, 1860, two days after returning from the convent. She affectionately remembers her life at the convent and the special bond of closeness that she felt for Sister Veronique:

I have just left the convent where I spent such happy years. I have been here for the past two days. All the sisters presented me with a gift each. They
were really sad to see me leave forever with my dear father, especially sister Veronique; she prayed with me for a long while in front of the alter, and then she gave me a small silver cross...I wept on leaving her, as she had really been an elder sister to me (The Diary 21).

Luce Irigaray says: “Women want to find themselves, discover themselves and their own identity. Which is why they are seeking each other out, loving each other, associating with each other” (Irigaray 1993: 66). A woman reaches out to her own female friends for support in a way that she cannot get from her family. Sister Veronique was sympathetic to Marguerite when she had come to the convent for the first time leaving her parents. This is fondly recollected in Marguerite’s diary written on the day she leaves the convent with her father. She tells her father that it was Sister Veronique who offered her support during her first days in the convent:

You see, the first month, I was sad because I missed you and mamma so much so that I only cried and prayed in my little room, and Sister Veronique realized it and took pity on me. Her father and her mother are both dead; she talked to me about them, and her brother who also died very young, and then of a ship’s captain, her cousin whose vessel sank. No one was saved, and her cousin too perished in that, so she took her vows (The Diary 22).

This experience of female bonding is carefully presented in the beginning of the novel where Marguerite feels a sense of closeness for Sister Veronique during her stay in the convent. The cross that Sister Veronique presented to Marguerite serves as a memory of friendship all through her life.

Toru Dutt’s own friendship with Mary Martin provided comfort in her period of illness. She acknowledges the immense support her friendship had offered her. In
a letter written to Mary Martin on December 27, 1876, she writes about her profound wish to see her friend:

Dear, your friendship is so precious to me; I sometimes think I do not deserve so much from you. If you do intend coming to India, dear, some time or the other, do make haste, for I long to see you (Das The Letters: 245).

Marguerite also receives a similar letter from Sister Veronique on September 18, "I received a letter from Sister Veronique today. She is ill, very ill and she wants to see me as soon as possible" (42). The parting scene where Sister Veronique is on her death bed shows the tragic end of this relationship. However, if not in this world, there is the expectation of their re-union in heaven as Sister Veronique tells Margeurite, "Poor Marguerite! you really liked me then? Do not cry my child I will be so happy, up in heaven! We will recognize each other" (42).

The possibility of continuing the relationship of friendship in the next life also finds expression in one of Toru Dutt's letters written to Mary Martin on September 16, 1876:

Yours is indeed a rare and warm affection for me, and, dear, I feel at times such keen pleasure when I think about it. God bless you, dear, for it; and though we may not meet in this world, perhaps we may through His grace meet in that happier and far better home (Das The Letters: 202).

During her last days before her death, Toru Dutt becomes obsessed with the desire to meet her friend. It is evident from the letters that she even fantasized about her friend visiting her home in Calcutta. On January 15, 1877 she writes:

Yesterday morning, at about nine, I heard the wheels of a carriage on the gravel: it may be Mary! Then I thought of you and my welcoming you here,
in Calcutta in our own house, and our mutual joy at meeting again, Shall we meet here on earth again? And if so where -- in England or in India? (Das The Letters 252).

Marguerite’s attending the funeral of Sister Veronique is also presented in detail. Marguerite immortalizes this sad event in her diary where she describes the last sight of Sister Veronique lying in her coffin with ‘crossed hands’ holding the crucifix (44). Through this brief relationship between Marguerite and Sister Veronique, Toru Dutt presents the way female friendship is circumscribed and difficult to develop. She tries to give permanence to the relationship in the novel through the manner in which Marguerite keeps alive the presence of Sister Veronique:

Sister Veronique was, like I had already said, an elder sister to me. In the convent she was my companion and my teacher. I feel that I can still hear her gentle voice repeating the lines of the Gospel (The Diary 44).

Marguerite reminiscences about Sister Veronique after leaving the convent and this sustain and give a sense of permanence to the relationship in a way that is not possible in actuality. As she writes on her diary on September 5, 1860: “The moon made me think of Sister Veronique of my convent; she too is chaste and beautiful and pale, like the star of the night” (32). Marguerite pays a tribute to Sister Veronique when she goes to visit the vault. She writes on September 30, “The last day of the month! I went to visit the tomb of Sister Veronique at the convent. Grass had covered the soil…” (49).

The companionship shared by one young woman for another is focused through the relationship between Marguerite and Sister Veronique. Thus, the fictional form helps her to explore other relationships that were different from the
conventional social and fictional relationship of love between a man and a woman. It gave free expression to her repressed thoughts and emotions, which she could not reveal through the other modes.

In all these three forms — poetry, letters and fiction, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu found space to write their selves. The act of writing gave them a sense of confidence and it was necessary to share this feeling in a collective way. This demanded the use of an oral and more direct form of expression. This fourth form was the speech, which was widely employed by men to disseminate the sense of nationalism. It was difficult for a woman to speak in public, as the domain of speech seemed reserved for man. The act of public speaking was a kind of transgression for a woman, as it required tremendous confidence on the part of the speaker. Therefore, woman’s use of this mode comes at a later stage when she establishes herself as a subject. Women like Sarojini Naidu felt the necessity to establish this bond of sisterhood through the medium of speech. The next chapter deals with the mode of speech. It examines the speeches of Sarojini Naidu to show how she used speech as a medium to interact with the hearers and to establish a bond of sisterhood with them.

Notes

All citations from Toru Dutt’s novels are from “Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden”. In Toru Dutt: Collected Prose and Poetry. Ed. Chandani Lokuge. New Delhi: OUP, 2006 and The Diary of Mademoiselle d’Arvers. trans. N. Kamala. London: Penguin Books, 2005. They are indicated as (Bianca p no) and (The Diary p no) in the chapter.

1. Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s Devi Chaudhurani, published in 1884 contains a new space for women. Here he creates the image of the Veerangana (“The warrior women”), a space which was outside the domestic roles given to women (Mukherjee 2000:77). But this space was sanctioned only in moments of crisis,
when women remained outside the domestic space. Within the walls of the household, a woman’s code of conduct was different.

2. Swarnakumari Devi wrote her first novel *Dipnirban* (The Snuffing Out of the Light) in 1870. Tharu and Lalita have translated the first and eighth chapter of her fiction *Kahake* (1898) and included them in their first volume of women’s writings (Tharu and Lalita 1991:239). Raj Lakshmi Devi’s *The Hindoo Wife* or *The Enchanted Fruit* was published in 1876. Krupa Satthianadan’s autobiographical novel *Saguna: A Story of a Native Christian* was published serially in the Christian college Magazine in 1889 and 1890. Her second novel *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* was published in 1895.

3. Irigaray says that man fails to leave woman a subjective life and circumscribes her within a master-slave dialectic where he is the absolute master (Irigaray 1993:10). As man creates his identity with her as his starting point, the nationalist discourse invents the image of the mother to give an identity to its idea of the nation.

4. Photograph in *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt* by Harihar Das: 1921.


7. On several occasions in her letters to Mary Martin, Toru Dutt refers to M. Boquel, her French teacher. While reading Charlotte Bronte’s novel, *Villette*, she perceives some resemblances between M. Boquel and the French Professor, Paul Emanuel, in the novel. While referring to the novels of Charlotte Bronte to her friend, Mary Martin, Toru Dutt comments on May 13, 1876, “*The Life of Charlotte Bronte*”, by Mrs. Gaskell, induced me to read some of Miss Bronte’s works. *Shirley* is well written and interesting; *Villette* is a failure; there is one character which is interesting, a French ‘professeur’, M. Paul Emanuel; he reminds me of M. Boquel” (Das 1921:156). In the same letter, she writes: “As I am writing, I am taking a look now and then at *Villette*. I was just now quite amused at a description of M. Emanuel’s bearing ‘en classe’; it is like M Boquel (Das 160). In another letter written to Mary Martin on July 15, 1876, she writes at the end: “M. Boquel has not written to me yet; I suppose he will as soon as he receives mine” (Das 188).

8. Referring to the women’s liberation movement in France (1968), Irigaray says that the younger women of France had become allergic of the term “feminism”. They wanted to be recognized as women – to “live as they wished and love according to their own desires,” and thereby construct a history in a feminine mode. Irigaray
asserts that the idea of being or becoming a woman is not to be viewed as the effect of social conditioning but a desire to be cultivated and offered to be recognized (Irigaray 2000:35).

9. Lucy Snow, the narrator in Villette feels a growing attraction for the French professor, Paul Emanuel. It allows her some moments of emotional happiness but the narrative ends with an Atlantic storm, leaving a profound uncertainty as to whether her love will ever be fulfilled.

Works cited


