Conclusion
Several recent works by women about women have explored with quite remarkable delicacy and colour, the notion of identity. The writers chosen for this endeavour, from Africa, West Indies and India, are unique insofar that, unlike other contemporary novelists overtly manipulating form, they are less concerned with the artifice of the post-modernist experiment than with finding an alternative way to be open to the experience, to ‘sink under the surface of the self, the mirror’s skin’. States of being, like dejection, emptiness, doubts or desolation are seen as fertile ground for new growth. These women writers are chosen for their astounding capacity to astutely move beyond an ‘Ash Wednesday’ vacuum where fears of isolation, inadequacy, loss or stasis dominate, to celebrate potential.

Women writers now insist on their right to reject a life, which is prescribed by a male-dominated, anti-individual society. Moreover, they now have the courage to depict this ideology in their works, and do not consider it parochial to be concerned with such concepts. It is in this context that a woman writing about her quest for individuality performs a social act. African and West Indian writers re-appropriate the colonial language to serve their interests. As writers nurtured on the ‘bile’ of colonial language whose only interest was imperialistic, they see no other way around it, only through it, challenging the mystification and half truths at its core. For women writing in India, the politics of gender shapes to a very great extent their literary initiatives which are attempts to
express the differences in perception and ideology. Women in India live very much in an ‘inside’ world, when compared to their African and Caribbean counterparts, and the social expectations for women are different.

The celebration of ‘differences within similarities’ lies in the three distinct approaches made by the authors chosen, in their quest to shift the focus to the ‘centre’ which now assumes a new meaning within the feminine mindset as that crucial area where a woman defines herself, transcending the marginalisation imposed by the oppressing forces of tradition, religion, patriarchal society and even destiny. This quest relegates distances to the physical or geographical and brings to the focal point a particular framework, a symbolic enclosure from within which women can contemplate and forge as new unifying identity. The choice of texts gives three different approaches to this recasting of the centre, which now emerges as the all-powerful presence. Women are encouraged to surpass their marginalised existence in the world, not in order to merge with existing centres but to create unique spaces, central in society.

In the words of Grace Akello:
"If society belongs to all human beings, but some human beings cling on to it with their fingertips, then they must tell society that they too have hands. Women too want to hold society in the depth of their palms, to feel it, to nurse it, to savour it, and to know that it is wonderful to be alive!"

The saga of women’s rights can, in a brutal simplification, be described as circular. A very early period of sex equality seems to have been followed by a long period of retrogression, then by efforts to regain some of the lost equality. A common thread in the few documented histories of women’s rights is their agreement on the downward trend in societal recognition of gender equality.

Inevitably, as one layer of the discrimination phenomenon is peeled away, other layers appear. Gender discrimination is so firmly embedded in the history of humanity that it is often not perceived as discrimination. Because women have always been burdened with unpaid household work and glorified on the pedestal of motherhood, this is deemed to be the only natural state of affairs. It is self-evident therefore, that action against discrimination requires knowledge of the pattern of discrimination.

Challenging gender discrimination is not easy - it often necessitates criticism of a government’s policy and practice. Moreover it is frequently institutionalised, and enforced by tradition, religion and social and cultural norms.
Of all the violations of human rights, the most systematic, widespread, entrenched and brutal is the denial of equality to women. This starts early, and it is usually the male child who gets the lion’s share of available resources: of food and maternal attention, of health care and education. And, as the male progresses from infancy to adulthood, these advantages multiply in terms of access to employment and decision-making roles. This deeply entrenched preference for males in many societies encourages neglect and exploitation of the girl-child/adolescent, and ultimately lowers the status of women. Stereotyped and robbed of her self-esteem, the adolescent girl very often faces a life of servitude and eventually becomes a role model for her own children — and this effect snowballs.

Descriptions of the celebration of the birth of a son abound in historical and contemporary literature; son preference is a reflection of patriarchal societies. This constitutes a fact that many would not associate with human rights. Parents who prefer a son to a daughter are not breaching any law, nor could the law even attempt to outlaw people’s wishes. Son preference, however, becomes an important human rights issue when it results in discrimination against female children.

A survey conducted in thirty-nine Third World/developing countries shows that daughter preference existed in only two countries—Venezuela and Jamaica. The strongest son preference was documented in the Indian subcontinent. Such preferences are however, largely shaped by economic and social factors, and are amenable to change; an initiative is
needed to address the intergenerational transmission of gender discrimination at the family level.

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge for social policy and practice regarding families today is to provide direction for the evolution of the concept of family in conformity with basic human rights and social principles, and to accelerate the elimination of practices within and on account of families that are not compatible with those standards. In this process, among a multitude of inter-related issues, women and the family is a topic which is at the forefront.

As the world's oldest form of expression of human relationship, the family has survived for thousands of years, adapting itself constantly to changing socio-economic conditions and the progress of humanity. It is universally accepted as the basic unit of society and appreciated for the important socio-economic functions that it performs. Yet, there is no simple view of the family, nor can there be a universally applicable definition. The diversity and divergence in families is a faithful reflection of the cultural pluralism of the individuals that constitute societies.

The family is a living, evolving institution, affected by socio-economic factors as well as by changes that shape the social environment in which it functions and consequently, families are undergoing constant change, due to numerous factors, including the quest for equality between men and women as well as shifts in values, particularly those supporting individualism.
Women are seen as inseparable from the family and most functions assigned to the family are allocated to women within it. Women are usually the carers, the nurturers, the educators, the source of stability, and also, increasingly cash contributors.

The family has contradictions. It can be a shelter, offering its members security and protection from the hardships of the outside world and a place of nurturing and personality building, the 'centre' for culture learning, and especially economic and affective solidarity; simultaneously it can be the 'shadow' restrictive, and a hindrance to emotional development, in certain cases destroying individuality and often severely sanctioning exploitative divergences.

The women writers chosen for this endeavour have drawn attention to the hierarchical and patriarchal structure of most family types, the arena of women's subordination and the architecture of discriminatory gender roles. A feminist appraisal opens, for public view, the privacy of family life, and exposes not only affection and protection but also inequality and misogyny. No one remains unaffected by women's movements; if one truly values human equality right from the cradle, value systems have to change.

Uncertainties faced in interpersonal relationships heighten the dire social and economic situations faced by women in these countries selected for study. Yet, despite the complex lives depicted in these stories, an understated sense of the sanguine is omnipresent. Characters
believe in the possibility of seeing, interpreting and acting in the world in a distinct way. As one would expect from such heterogeneous regions, race, gender and class relations predominate. Other issues examined by the women writers are childhood, mother-daughter relationships, and the role of history, culture and politics in shaping society. The threat of social change and political transformation sometimes polarises communities, the authors seem to say, pitting neighbour against neighbour, husband against wife, children against parents and the individual against the community. For all this, very few stories endorse a negative nihilistic vision, finding instead the proverbial silver lining behind every cloud.

With the dynamic sureness of their art, with the absolute control of medium which is the mark of the total artist, the writers chosen have made the wheel of life turn a full circle, and have offered us a vision which dualistically combines, comprehends and transcends the apparent opposites of our expectations, creating thereby a transcendentally unified and unifying vision of reality, be it humane or inhumane. Pristine or tarnished, this vision stands exposed, explored and exploded by these artists in their quest to recast existing shadows and assert their centrality.

Thus, these brave female voices from the Caribbean, along with those from Africa and India try to vindicate the fact that those historically and socially alienated remain silent to those who do not know how to hear what they have to say. Women have been marginalized - but they are not marginal; from their perspective they are central. To assert their centrality in the face of suppression is an attempt to appropriate
malestream texts as part of a larger attempt to determine the course of their own lives.

When a woman displaces herself from the margins to rewrite the dominant discourses, she cannot but be subversive – but as Joanna Russ succinctly remarks, it is 'only on margins that growth occurs'!