

WRITING RESISTANCE

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WOMEN'S NOVELS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHIES:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

USHA BANDE



GOLDEN JUBILEE SERIES

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*To the loving memory
of my sister Vibha Pathak
who had immense faith in me*

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Preface to the First Edition

When I first considered exploring resistance in Indian women's writings in English, my idea of resistance was almost conventional, limited to seeing resistance as an overt protest and defiance; and was colored with Western feminist notions – the individualistic self-assertion, the quest for identity, the question of 'control' over sexuality, in short, a lot of cliché we associate with feminist theory and that contemporary women's writings seem to subscribe to at first glance. But delving deeper, I discovered not only the broad range of resistance practices but also their intensely penetrating power. The concept of resistance is shaped by the contemporary discourses of postcolonialism, poststructuralism, postmodernism and even postfeminism, and in turn resistance shapes the social order by its non-confrontational, non-violent action. In time, it becomes the dreaded "weapon of the weak." Since resistance is enacted in the socio-cultural milieu, it cannot be understood and defined separated from the culture.

Therefore, any approach to resistance needs to be culture specific. This study starts on that premise and sees resistance operative in the fictional narratives from an Indo-centric angle. Many of the contemporary novels endorse the Western paradigms of resistance and defiance, with the result that the reader succumbs to its overall aggressive tone and frank female assertions, and the underlying cultural implications go unnoticed. On the other hand, if only culture is kept under focus, another problem arises: how does one identify women's resistance in a culture that theoretically sees woman as powerful and strong and yet renders her helpless and powerless by its persistent silencing strategies and severe hegemonic control? After all, a novel is a product of the balancing art of the author who weaves the current, lived realities with cultural exigencies

in the fabric of the narrative to achieve aesthetic effect. To work through such intricate patterns and pressures and to evaluate the oppositional stances that produce resistance becomes a rewarding critical exercise. Resistance works at several levels in contemporary novels. And though one recognizes the presence of the theoretical landscape in building resistance, one need not address these theories to understand resistance running through the texts.

This study takes into account the emergence of Indian feminism during the national struggle for freedom but does not negate the influence of Western theoretical concepts. Indian feminism emerged out of the historical process that was at once liberating and restrictive, open-minded and yet essentialist. The entire corpus of women's writing vibrates with resistance to authority but while the novels up to the 1980s have either mild or circuitous form of resistance, vacillating between a feeble 'yes' or an ineffectual 'no', the works of the 1980s and after demonstrate confidence in saying 'no' to injustice and 'yes' to the self. I have concentrated on the novels written in the 1980s and 1990s, though some of them tend to look back on the 1940s and even beyond like Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* and a significant part of Deshpande's *A Matter of Time* and Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Besides, almost all the novelists portray the modern, urban, middle class woman who is educated, aware, sensitive, and influenced by Western ideas yet conscious of the indigenous traditions and culture. That evolves a pattern and gives an edge to this analysis.

Readers may find it arguable that this discussion gives a major space to Shashi Deshpande whose three novels come under scrutiny whereas only one work each of the remaining six novelists has been examined. It may be clarified here, though not to justify, that only Shashi Deshpande has dealt with the issue of rape, an important aspect of feminist debate on violence and violation, and to the woman's right to body. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *The Binding Vine* have, therefore, deserved extra attention with one chapter devoted to rape and its aftermath without which no study of resistance could be called complete.

I am aware that a strong body of fiction still remains to be explored and a large number of women novelists go unrepresented – Kamala Markandaya, Attia Hossain, Nayantara Sahgal and many works of Anita Desai, the powerful diasporic women writers, the European or non-Indian writers like Ruth Jhabwala who resists the Indian society, and the new millennium writers. Also, the rural, the semi-rural and the unprivileged woman who really gives credence to any investigation directed at knowing the Indian woman is nowhere in sight; but then, one would have to turn to writers like M.K.Indira (Kannnada), Mahasweta Devi and Asha Purna Devi (Bangali), Vibhavari Shiroorkar (Marathi) and a whole lot of regional language writings, that would mean embarking on another investigation. The purpose of any study of this kind is not to venture into too broad a canvas that may become unmanageable and diffused; the aim should be to open up vistas for further inquiry so that new and fresh perspective is added to the existing body of knowledge. The ball is set rolling; it is for the younger generation critics and scholars to take up the challenge.

Indian Institute of Advanced Study
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USHA BANDE
Fellow

Preface to the Second Edition

In writing this 'Preface' to the 2nd edition of *Writing Resistance*, I am keenly aware of the time gap of almost eight years between the first edition (2006) and the second edition likely to be out in 2014. Inevitable changes have taken place over the years – new perspectives and perceptions have evolved, academic debates are redefining old concepts, new critical books tend to look at resistance in more structured manner and the rapid publication of latest literary works are opening up possibilities of alternative interpretations and resolutions. An intriguing feature has been the availability of marginalized women's self-narratives and autobiographies in English translations brought out by big publishing houses like Penguin, Oxford and others. These have given the authors more visibility. Mukhtar Mai's *In the Name of Honour* (Virago, 2006) and Bama's *Karukku* (Oxford, 2012) are a few of them that gave boost to their side of the picture.

Resistance is part of any given socio-cultural milieu and is integral to life as well as to art/literature. A powerful body of women's writings still remains unexplored and calls for further study. My earlier book does not give representation to the voices coming from the margins, not because I neglected them but because their works were not available. Now that some of the regional language works are in hand, I have added one chapter "Resistance from the Margins" to the present edition. Voices from the margins persistently interrogate, subvert and challenge the existing system and cannot be ignored when one is exploring issues such as resistance to power structures and hegemony.

I wish to extend my gratitude to Prof. Jasbir Jain for her thoughtful gift: her latest work *Theorizing Resistance* (2012) which gave me a new base to look at the concept and broadened my outlook;

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Shimla
20 June 2014

USHA BANDE

Don't walk in front of me
I may not follow.
Don't walk behind me
I may not lead.
Walk beside me
And
Just be my friend.

—ALBERT CAMUS

I am not the woman
Who may be worshipped on a pedestal;
I am not the woman
To be condescendingly allowed to follow;
Only if you let me walk beside you
And let me share your prosperity
And adversity,
Will you get to know me.

—RABINDRANATH TAGORE in *Chitrangada*

One

Introduction

The ‘No’ of resistance is not the ‘no’ of denial. It is the ‘no’ of acknowledgement of what happened and refusal to let it happen again.

—SUSAN J. BRISON

As a single leaf turns not yellow but with the silent knowledge of the whole tree, so the wrong-doer cannot do wrong without the hidden will of you all.

—KHALIL GIBRAN

Contemporary Indian women’s writing is marked by the imperatives of saying ‘No’, thus giving impetus to what is appropriated as resistance: the phenomenon that insists on rethinking the past and eliminating the traditional hegemonic biases that obstructed the identity of the subaltern group (women in this case) and silenced them. Resistance involves re-interpretation so as to bring the marginalized into the center; it also recognizes the need to “hear voices” and give consideration to the dispossessed. By its semantic nature—it is derived from the Latin root-word *resistére*, meaning to stand against—it denotes a slow but insistent, invisible but enduring behavioral strategy having the potential to dislodge the dominant structure, if not dismantle it. Resistance can be defined, to borrow from Haynes and Prakash, as “non-confrontational” and “contestatory” and “constantly present in the behaviors, traditions and consciousness

of the subaltern,” having the power to “tear through the fabric of hegemonic forms” (Haynes & Prakash 1991:1). Scholars in the field take into account its socio-cultural nature and tend to locate the recurring interplay between domination and resistance. Domination gives rise to resistance, and resistance emerges as a consequence of power play. It is conditioned by those very social and political power structures that it seeks to challenge. These facts point toward two important situations: first, that domination and resistance are mutually dependent, neither is autonomous; and second, that power is central to both.¹ Since dramatic events or heroic deeds of revolutionary or rebellious nature are not the constituents of resistance, it is believed to have the capacity to build an identity-giving culture.²

Representation of ‘resistance’ in women’s fictional narratives and autobiographies articulates both the existence of the dominant power structure and the female desire to disavow and defy that structure. In doing so, it becomes a vehicle for expressing the cultural, literary and feminist dilemmas concerning the validation of female agency and the recovery of the female voice. Resistance is a part of the dynamics of social life. As a process, lived in culturally and socially specific ways, it needs to be understood in its socio-cultural-historical perspective, as also from a gender-specific viewpoint. Women’s resistance is variable, complex and multivalent because women live in dialectical relations with the patriarchal ideological structure. The fact that they have “a consensual and contractual relationship” (Sangari 1993:867-82) with men produces a mixture of consent and resistance and places women in a contradictory relationship with patriarchy and the dominant discourse. Sangari points out that in ‘traditional’ and ‘semi-traditional’ societies like ours, the spheres of power reserved for women provide them space for their subjectivity within the society, giving them power to exercise their agency. Besides, in the South Asian context, women’s issues need to be addressed taking into account factors such as

class, caste, community and the tribal situation; in short, it needs to be culture-specific.

Perhaps the most troubling proposition for scholars reading resistance in literature concerns the relationship between resistance and literature and resistance and other contemporary discourses such as feminism, post-feminism, postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism. Resistance by itself is not a theory, nor is it an ideology but because of its non-confrontational nature, its sensitivity to the subaltern and the 'other', its project to recontextualize and retrieve the past and its commitment to culture, it is associated with all those theoretical disciplines that foreground multiplicity, particularity and heterogeneity, and identify the resistant impulses of the powerless. This, however, does not go on to suggest that all current theories are critical declarations against power, or that all the "post" discourses can be looked at as homogenized universals. Even then, one cannot dismiss the role of the critical theories in valorizing the powerless, the oppressed and the dispossessed. As Homi K. Bhabha points out, "a range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lesson for living and thinking. There is even a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality ... transforms our critical strategies" (Bhabha 1994:172).

From Marx to Foucault, including Bhabha, Spivak, Ahmad and the feminists, the question of "power" has been close to the theorists and their theories attempting to define the various positions—political, economic, historical and concerning gender. They visualize change in the existing conditions, and it is here that the different discourses intersect. To put it simply, postmodernism is an anti-authoritarian movement; poststructuralism is a critique of historicism with its emphasis on the injustice towards the marginalized; postcolonialism represents a heightened awareness of power relations between the erstwhile imperial power

and the colonial subject, and postfeminism shifts its focus to the terrain of culture to resolve women's issues. Within the context of this juncture, the issues related to resistance become visible. The very idea of change has at its basis the resistance consciousness, which conversely generates resistance to resistance itself. As a critic observes: "Resistance to the feminist movement easily turns into a resistance to seeing that women have any problem at all" (Richards 1980:3). That makes it possible to juxtapose different theoretical issues and concerns with such oppositional debates to call into question the systems of representation and the institutionalized power.

Scholars of late have been emphasizing on the role of power structures and the circulation of power as fundamental to the understanding of oppression, injustice and objectification, be it in relation to the colonized or the subaltern or gender. Feminist scholars in particular have focused upon the spheres of 'power' as signs of women's transformative capacity. Theorists of power often see resistance as an exercise of power, "a projection of alternative truth" (Radtike and Stam 1994:53). In their creative writings women are manifesting what Foucault calls a "reverse discourse"³(Foucault 1980:101), that is, they critique the existing power structure and at the same time they tend to borrow from its tenets and re-inscribe its concepts, thus contesting their own spaces and re-shaping their surroundings. Linda Hutcheon, a theorist of feminism and postmodernism asserts in one of her interviews that since women have to define themselves against the dominant discourse, they often speak the language of the dominant and subvert it through various literary strategies like parody or exaggeration. By re-contextualizing it they mimic the speech without subscribing to its "implied ideals and value" (O'Grady 1998:20-22). As such, any study of resistance must take into account the system of power operating in social, political or economic organizations.

Resistance Literature Vs. Literary Resistance

Since this study seeks to examine ‘resistance operative in literature’ rather than focus on what has gained popularity of late as ‘resistant literature,’ the distinction between “Resistance Literature” and “literary resistance” needs to be clarified at the outset. ‘Resistance Literature’ stands for definitive texts, which examine the relationship between literature, and Third world liberation movements, whereas ‘literary resistance’ is contestatory in nature and it is used for a genre of oppositional writing, a writing meant not only to protest but also to materially and conceptually change the existing situation to allow for empowerment. Resistance may not necessarily be transparent in the literary text because it cannot be represented as a matter of intentionality, but it is “always *necessarily* complicit in the apparatus it seeks to transgress” (Slemon 1995:108).

Barbara Harlow’s work *Resistance Literature* first introduced to the West the political role of literature in armed struggles. Earlier, Palestinian writer-critic Ghassan Kanafani had used the term ‘resistance’ in 1966 for Palestinian literature in his work *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948—1966*. Harlow extended the scope to include the body of literature coming from countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia that are engaged in armed struggle for liberation. In her ‘Preface,’ Harlow elaborates that the struggles for national liberation and independence have not only sought socio-economic control and cultural domination but have also produced “a significant corpus of literary writing, both narrative and poetic, as well as a broad spectrum of theoretical analysis of the political, ideological and cultural parameters of this struggle” (Harlow 1987: xvi). The difference between voicing resistance through literary texts and producing ‘resistance literature’ is thus subtle. The foundational principle of the latter is to problematize the persistent continuation of liberation movements in which literature becomes as an arena of

struggle against hegemony, domination and oppression; literary resistance, on the other hand, though marked by a profound struggle with power, is never a linear narrative of victimization.

A significant question that needs to be discussed here is: how far is the Harlow model of resistance literature compatible in relation to India? Harlow discusses the case of India only twice, and that too, in the passing: in *A Passage to India*, Harlow argues, the Indian character's role is seen by Western critics as "peripheral" (17) thereby pushing the "natives" in the background as insignificant; further, she sees the "cultural imperialism" of the British imposed via their "selective educational system" and resistance to it as a "critical part of geo-political strategy and confrontation" (20). These instances do not approximate to the existence of resistance literature in India.

During the freedom struggle a body of literature in the genre of prose, poetry, fiction and folk-theatre, songs and other folk practices *did* emerge articulating resistance against the British colonialism. But as Ashis Nandy points out, because of the "unique gestalt" of our culture, instead of an absolute rejection of the West, Indians deflated the determinism of history and imposed domination upon the facts of history (Nandy 1983:73-5).⁴ The freedom struggle thus generated intellectual inspiration for the Indian writers. The need to remake their histories and reclaim their voices and visions became part of a wider struggle to change the material and social reality and produced resistance. The impact of the leaders like Gandhi who advocated passive resistance and the revolutionaries like Tilak who rejected non-violent means: those who believed in self-upliftment and those in self-empowerment, is characteristic of much of our literature written during this period.

Later politico-historical events: the Independence, partition and partition violence, the 1984 riots after Mrs. Indira Gandhi's assassination, the Ayodhya issue and communal tensions and such other problems have given rise to strong resentment. Works

like Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* dealing with partition, Shashi Tharoor's *Riot*, on the Ayodhya issue, Amrinder Kaur's *Lajo*, focusing on 1984 riots have powerful strains of resistance. Across the sub-continent, Bapsi Sidhwa resents the political purblindness of the leaders responsible for the partition of India (*Ice-Candy Man* and *The Pakistani Bride*), Taslima Nasreen resists fundamentalism (both Hindu and Muslim) in *Lajja*, and Manjushree Thapa of Nepal in her debut novel *The Tutor of History* contests the political ethics in Nepal. Mahasweta Devi takes up her fight for the subaltern and protests against political and hegemonic oppressive structures, while Marathi Dalit literature exhibits anger against the oppressive caste system. The subtle modes of resistance to social, political and patriarchal hegemony have drawn the attention of Ranjit Guha, the Subaltern Studies scholar, inspiring him to raise a number of critical debates concerning their depiction in literature. Hearing women's voices in literature produces the question of the subjecthood and the problematic of consent and agency. Recovery of women's traditions of writing has succeeded to an extent in retrieving the suppressed identities by highlighting their everyday activities.

However, this literature bears no resemblance to Harlow's model of "resistance literature". Resistance to hegemony does exist in these writings; sometimes the resistance is even overt and vocal but the fundamental union between the armed struggle and the culture present in 'resistance literature' is seldom perceptible. For example, there is anger, protest and frustration born out of the helplessness of the situation in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, K.S.Venkatramani's *Murugan, the Tiller*, Gurdial Singh's *Marhi da Dive* and many other works on Indian peasants and working classes, but these are not born out of any unified struggle for liberation. In *A Handful of Rice* (Kamala Markandaya), the protagonist, though reckless, desists from joining the mob in their looting and other anti-social activities. In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao raises the question of caste

and untouchability in a convincing manner through Moorthy who exemplifies the Gandhian principles of Ahimsa. Similarly, in Mulk Raj Anand's *The Sword and the Sickle*, Lalu knows that real strength comes from will power not from physical force. These texts consistently fight against the forces of oppression, class-caste-bias, communalism and sexism but they are different from resistant texts such as Tawfiq Yusuf Awwad's *Death in Beirut* (1972) or Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1983) or Sonallas Ibrahim's *The Smell of It* (1971) that recount the gruesome stories of revenge, politicization of everyday life and the travails of a just released political prisoner.

Resistance in Women's Study

The notion of resistance to dominance entered women's studies with the various sociological researches on women workers carried out in Britain in the 1980s to examine peasant women, domestic servants and female factory workers' responses to domination. Later, feminists found the Fanonian notion that the powerless exhibit the elements of dependence and independence and are always acutely aware of the powerful, quite useful to formulate their own version of resistance. Discussing the feminist shift from women's subjectivity to the politics of resistance, R. Sunder Rajan observes that "the question of resistance has relevance to feminism beyond what is common to resistance studies in other fields" because of "...women's complex and differentiated relations with men and with patriarchy" (Sunder Rajan 2000:158). In the Indian context, the voluminous work of Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha, the path-breaking articles in journals like *Manushi* in English and other journals in the regional languages, the books published by Kali for women attempted to revive various alternative traditions to fight their battle with the fundamentalists, resistance being one of them. If a work essentially opposes the deprecating of an individual,

it can be deemed to resist the dominant discourse. However, literature voicing resistance need not necessarily be revolutionary in character. To oppose a system of power or to question the validity of a tradition at linguistic level, does not axiomatically herald social/material change. Reading resistance in literature to discover where and how women have created spaces for themselves to resist the dominant discourse and how they assert their agency raises certain pertinent questions regarding representation.

In order to understand how female resistance develops and is brought to bear on the social system and cultural ideologies of a particular time and place, one must understand women's subjectivity and how and where women have created spaces for themselves to resist patriarchy. Feminists have established a methodology to read the way women's knowledge of themselves and their circumstances change; how they develop their knowledge and transmit it through their writings; how they have given voice to their experiences through the written word. Nevertheless, as Kumkum Sangari cautions, to interpret every action or literary writing as producing agency and hence resistance would mean succumbing to a "narrow culturalism" (Sangari 1993: 867-882), which needs to be guarded against.

Since literature provides more imaginative space from which to examine resistance as compared to ethnographic or historical accounts, it allows for resistance to be interwoven in the body of the text. In fiction, the matrix of the narrative offers vast possibilities in terms of metaphorical complexity, resolution of plot or ideological triumph of the character. It could be argued that in women's writings, the depiction of resistance to socio-cultural context is rather covert and has done little to dislodge the dominant discourse. In her perceptive book *The Law of the Threshold*, Malashree Lal too points out that Indian women's writing tends to be "non-aggressive" (Lal 1995: 28) but she contends that of late women's texts are questioning the traditional imperatives.

There are two significant points to be considered with regard to women's inability to resist: first, women have emotional ties with patriarchy and socially they are conditioned to maintain a balance between complicity, conformity and protest; second, any drastic opposition to patriarchal ideology or its representation in literary text would be too dramatic to be real or too ideal to be practicable. Resistance enacted by women, though seemingly insignificant and weak, has provided especially fertile ground for theorizing "unlikely forms of resistance" that can be termed as "subversions" (Abu-Lughod 1990: 41). Subversive activities and their portrayals in literature may be interpreted as acts of minor defiance within the limitations of female space defined by the social power structure. For example, the very undertaking of writing by women is an act of resistance. Again, women's efforts in tracing the history of women's writing and of establishing a female tradition of writing, as against the canonical writing, can be viewed as resistance. As feminist critics observe, feminist theory has been able to draw attention to the power differential between men and women and transforming traditional academic philosophy to an extent. In their elaborate introduction to *Women Writing in India*, Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha opine that women's texts, though mapping the imaginative worlds in which they wrote, have often been engaged in resisting the politics of gender. Women's writings "have fed into and elaborated the course of dominance and the investment of gender in it, but they have also deflected and refigured that course" (Tharu and Lalitha 1980:116). By writing resistance, the writer (both male and female), shows a fundamental opposition to the social system he/she describes. A critic can bear out with textual examples the capacity of a text to resist, without being able to assess the result of the resistance. In fact, since literary resistance works in the arena of the imaginary, the positive result of a writer's act of resistance cannot be easily charted. A text is always a base of cultural context, but it is never a self-sufficient, self-explanatory locale.

Historical and Cultural Context

Both feminism and women's resistance in India need to be understood against the background of colonialism and other historical and cultural contexts within which they are placed and the premise from which they function. It is largely because of their conditioning into passivity and their relation with the male, which requires total acquiescence to patriarchy, that women rarely showed resistance. Change, however, was visible when women joined the social reform movements and the National struggle at the call of the Nationalist leaders like Gandhi, Tilak and others. Participation generated awareness among those who made bold to come out to campaign for reforms. Women's movement did not occur in a vacuum; it corresponded to the wider socio-political context. As Radha Kumar points out, women's issues started figuring in the early nineteenth century and by the late nineteenth century women openly joined the reforms movements for amelioration of their conditions. Kumar also argues, "if early attempts at reforming the conditions under which Indian women lived were largely conducted by men, by the late nineteenth century their wives, sisters, daughters, protégés and others affected by campaigns, such as that for women's education, had themselves joined in the movements" (Kumar 1993:1). One of the basic issues was education for women. During the renaissance, the few educated women from the elite sections of the society were keen that the facility of education be extended to middle-class and other women.

Those women who were already in the nationalist struggle highlighted the concept of the 'new woman'. Even the Muslim intelligentsia sought a change in the condition of Muslim women as symbolic of their desire for change in the social order (Ali 2000:4). But the main thrust of educative literature was to justify the feminine virtues both in Hindu and Muslim societies. Ali points out, Ulama and other religious thinkers

“idealized woman’s character as one of purity, loyalty, moral sensitivity and domesticity and as a very submissive wife and a good mother” (Ali 2000:5), and held their education in check. In the Hindu society, women themselves became instrumental in insisting that education should be for fostering traditional virtues. Partha Chatterjee cites examples from Bengal saying that when the movement for education started, women spoke of the need for an educated woman to develop feminine qualities and virtues as chastity, self-sacrifice, submissiveness, devotion, kindness, patience, and the labor of love. The ideological point of view from which such protestations of ‘femininity’ were made was acceptable to patriarchy also. The main suspect was not education by itself, but its impact on Indian womanhood was dreaded as it was oriented in the direction of Western culture. Interestingly, one of the female advocates of woman’s education appealed to Indian women thus:

If you have acquired real knowledge, then give no place in your heart to memsahib-like behavior. That is not becoming in Bengali housewife. See how an educated woman can do housework thoughtfully and systematically in a way unknown to an ignorant, uneducated woman. And see how if God had not appointed us to this place in the home, how unhappy a place the world would be (qtd. in Chatterjee 1994:129).

Education then was meant to inculcate in women the feminine virtues. Any deviation from these became questionable. Thus, the nationalist construct of the ‘new’ woman derived its ideological strength from making cultural refinement as the goal of education. What Partha Chatterjee says of Bengal can well be applied to other parts of the country. The middle class women displayed a remarkable degree of enthusiasm to reap the benefits of formal education. They set this goal for themselves with the object of gaining freedom but the connotation of freedom was culture-linked:

Indeed, the achievement was marked by claims of cultural superiority in several different aspects: superiority over Western woman for whom, it was believed, education meant only the acquisition of material skills to compete with men in the outside world and hence a loss of feminine (spiritual) virtues; superiority over the preceding generation of women in their own homes who had been denied the opportunity of freedom by an oppressive and degenerate social tradition; and superiority over women of the lower classes who were culturally incapable of appreciating the virtues of freedom (Chatterjee 1994:129).

This particular nationalist construction of reform was both for women's self-emancipation and for the emancipation of her less fortunate sisters. Soon, positive sociological changes were evident when spirited women like Anandi Bai Joshi, Pandita Ramabai, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain from Bengal (now Bangla Desh), Sarla Devi Choudhari and others took bold steps to reap the benefits of education to further the cause of social change. This was construed as their acts of resistance and they encountered resistance from the society. Laudable as their efforts may be, in all their determinate manifestation in particular historical circumstances, they were shaped by the condition of subalternity and it took long before their resistance and assertion could afford them self-determination. The consciousness of resistance in terms of women's agency came only later in India with the advent of feminism.

What was said of Indian women could well be applied to the women of Sri Lanka, as the women's movement all over the subcontinent was almost alike. The issues of female education, social reforms, and the anti-colonial resistance gained momentum from the eighteenth/nineteenth century onwards. The educational system was, however, supportive of the prevailing traditional norms and the aim of education for girls was strictly to keep the women within home, to be good housewives and mothers. Other changes, nonetheless, came fast and the religious and national movements led to a cultural renaissance. When

a society is in transition and it passes through the turbulence of movements like the freedom struggle, the struggle to regain cultural representation and institute social reforms, it is certainly in a state of revolutionary consciousness. As Nelofer De Mel points out in *Women and the Nation's Narrative*, during such turbulent times, the “revolutionary language, hegemonic anticipations, shifting construction of ethnic, class, caste and cultural economies” and the State’s counter-moves produce space for unorthodox protest (Mel 2001:13). The traditional restrictions on the Sri Lankan women were relaxed to an extent by the early decades of the twentieth century and a few women writers, journalists, stage personalities made their debut, such as Manganayagam Thambiah whose novel appeared in 1914 which criticized the system of arranged marriages; in the 1920s came S. Sellamal’s novels also in Tamil voicing the necessity for social reform; Annie Boteju entered the theatre and reigned supreme between 1920s and 1930s; and Anil de Silva rose as a journalist. In the contemporary Sri Lanka, with militancy shaking the roots of the nation, there are many women who have joined the militant outfits, while there is also a steady stream of resistant literature pouring out.

From the brief over-view of the Indian woman’s movement, it is not difficult to surmise that feminism in India emerged out of the external and internal socio-historical realities and that right from its inception it acquired an indigenous character, rejecting the Western model. Discussing the emergence of feminism in the Third World countries, Kumari Jayawardena categorically states that feminism was not “imposed” on the Third World by the West, on the contrary, it was a product of the historical circumstances that brought about “ideological changes affecting women” (Jayawardena 1986: 2). The so-called ‘reform package’ was for the middle-class women and it is here that the middle-class ideology of ‘pure’ womanhood entered the movement combined with Gandhian essentialism. There was a

kind of distrust of the 'Western woman' and the Indian leaders made attempts to reiterate the concept of traditional femininity, glorifying ideal womanhood.

This tendency to glorify women is an act of negation and places an "enormous burden" on them. The dichotomy generated by the material/spiritual, home/outside world, masculine/feminine became the principal site of the national culture and the "law of the threshold," to use Malashri Lal's term, tightened its noose around women. Susie Tharu stridently criticizes this dichotomy in one of her articles. Tharu asserts that in Indian English literature, particularly of the early decades of the twentieth century, the writers saw women as goddesses, thus snatching away their right to be just human. The "burden of saving the nation: politically (Gandhi), spiritually (Aurobindo) and aesthetically/metaphysically (Raja Rao), [was] not just on women, but on the feminine ... not alive or growing, but sculpted..." (Tharu 1986:263). Consequently, the persistent picture is of woman as a composite of sacrifice, humility, and submissiveness, extolled for her mystic strength and psycho-spiritual intensity.

II

Nationalist Movement and Female Resistance

Any discourse on Indian feminism, therefore, has to take into consideration the nationalist ideology that rejected the 'West' in its anti-colonial struggle and concomitantly the 'Western' model of womanhood for the Indian woman, helping Indian feminism to create its own discursive space. But the 'new', 'enlightened' Indian woman was at strange crossroads. Educated in the Western style, she was supposed to be man's companion in the colonial society but her role was primarily in the home; she was to negate everything that was "backward" in the traditional society yet not embrace the Western values. This woman and

her likes, the “westernized modernist” (Kishwar and Vanita 1999:48), became the foremothers of the later feminists. Kishwar and Vanita see how the “pervasive cultural ideal of womanhood” is becoming a death trap for women, but they also realize the potential within the cultural tradition that can bring about real change in women’s condition:

Those of us who wish to combat or reject these ideals have, however, been largely ineffective because we tend to do so from a totally ‘Western, modernist’ standpoint. The tendency is to make people feel that they are backward and stupid to hold values that need to be rejected outright. We must learn to begin with more respect for traditions which people hold dear. We have to make the effort to develop an understanding of why these images of Indian women have such power over the minds and hearts of women themselves. We need to begin to separate the devastating aspects from the point of strength within the cultural traditions, and start using the strengths to transform the traditions (Kishwar & Vanita 1999:48).

In terms of the above problematic, woman’s resistance can be contextualized as motivated by the repressive and resistant tensions of the era of the national movement. The impact of the movement gave women insights into how culture has shaped their experience. They started identifying the roots of the problems and to suggest concrete strategies for change, to negotiate their own self-definitions and to explore avenues for self-assertion. The lessons of Indian culture are that women are strong, powerful and active, that they are capable of destroying the social hierarchy. Indian women’s desire for freedom arose from the influence of their own cultural heritage that gives them the view of themselves as strong. Vina Mazumdar, Leela Kasturi and others tracing the history of women’s struggles and nationalism argue that the above ideas of power can be used by women’s movements the world over to challenge the Western notion of both gender and ethnic inferiority.

Dealing elaborately with the question of defiance and resistance in subaltern study, James C. Scott makes some relevant observations that could well be applied to female resistance. In *Domination and the Act of Resistance: Hidden Transcript* (1990), Scott maintains that in their interaction with those who dominate and power over them, the subordinates deploy a variety in strategies and political discourse. He divides them as “public transcript” and “hidden transcript.” Scott enlarges the definition of resistance to include a “whole range of practices ... such as poaching, pilfering, clandestine tax evasion, and intentionally shabby work for the landlord” by the peasant (14). In his *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) he discusses the power of the everyday acts of resistance that are seemingly innocuous and trivial but pose challenge to domination and the dominator. In course of time, these minor and supposedly meaningless acts of dissidence produce conflict and contradictions in the social order by the refusal of the subordinate to recognize and identify with the interest of the dominant.

Women’s resistance, in life as well as in their writings, cannot be idealized as “pure” resistance on the lines of Scott because it works both inside and outside the dominant ideology that Homi K. Bhabha terms “ambivalence” in the context of colonial and postcolonial literary resistance. How women express themselves from the margin and challenge the notion of culture has generated much feminist debate. Addressing the problem of recovering women’s consciousness Judith Walkowitz contends that in writing their texts women use the resources of the dominant culture and in the process re-inscribe it:

Just because women are excluded from centers of cultural production, they are not left free to invent their texts, as some feminist critics have suggested. They are not ‘innocent’ just because they are often on the cultural sidelines. They draw on the cultural resources available to them—they make some amendments, they refocus or rewrite them in a different direction—yet they are basically bounded by certain

cultural parameters. . . . That individuals do not fully author their texts does not falsify Marx's insight that men (and in parenthesis women) make their own history, albeit under circumstances that they do not fully control or produce. They are makers as well as users of culture, subjected to the same social and ideological constraints, yet forcefully resisting those same constraints. (Walkowitz 1989:30).

There are several important features of women's resistance: women's own courage and determination in the struggle against oppression, deriving from their view of themselves as strong and powerful people; the influence of realizing personal experiences of the system of male domination, the contradiction between women's experience and male construction of that experience creating an instability in individual consciousness upon which external factors can act to effect change; the existence of waged work in the development of a class society and the possibility of individual woman earning an independent wage in profession providing the material basis for a change in the power relations between men and women in the family.

In recent times, feminism is exploring the two diametrically opposite positions in feminist writing—women's resistance and its absence. In fact, as Sunder Rajan argues, women's silence is no longer the silence of the weak; and that woman's resistance is different from protest, dissent or revolt because women do not usually take to collective activism:

Women's quietism, passivity, their consent and acquiesce to and even complicity with, patriarchy are no longer understood simply as signs of abject powerlessness or of false consciousness. These are instead recognized as real alternatives to 'resistance' available to women in negotiating a better deal for themselves in an objectively real situation of disempowerment. While some forms of this negotiation may also be read as—and may even actually be coded as—'resistance' in a private register, it is usual to distinguish between these and active resistance. By 'activism' I mean a collectively organized protest that seeks to bring about a change for the collectivity (Sunder Rajan 2000:158).

If feminism is a movement for “a fully human life” then it entails a quest to know and understand what it is to be a female, and to break the silence so as to reveal the sense of wrong suffered—the inequalities, the denials and the restrictions imposed stunting the female growth, and the tyranny of invisibility and victimization. Feminism itself entails resistance to invisibility and silencing; it is the recognition that resistance to power/gender relations is both integral to and distinct from all resistances to global injustice. Feminism is a willingness to reckon with gender disparities as a universal but ‘unnatural’ power reality—a structural process affecting both male and female—which can be deconstructed through consciousness-raising and social change. Feminist resistance is articulated through women’s movements and through individual actions including refusals and separations. If feminist resistance is shown through articulation, the most important aspect of it is to break the silence and to re-discover the female self. This desire is reflected in women’s writing and it is this desire that provides context for resistance. When Helene Cixous advises women to ‘write’, she expects them to speak out, “Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away so violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement...” (Cixous 1999:75). Resistance studies seek to identify what counts as resistance and to decide what the meaning of resistant action might be. In literature, it offers theoretical, analytical and reflective modes of thought as well as context-specific empirical research. In daily life small everyday acts of resistance go unnoticed but when recorded in literature, they become important agents to block patriarchal ideology and are valorized.

Resistance in Women's Writing

It would not be a truism to suggest that resistance to injustice and discrimination has existed in subtle ways in women's creative writings since the colonial days, though locating it has been of recent post-colonial/post-modern interest. Those who found outlets in creative writing recorded their protest in their memoirs, autobiographical writings, personal diaries and letters; some others wrote and published verses or fiction creating situations and characters to expose and resist the oppressive society. Often these women writers were from the elite class having the advantage of education and liberal atmosphere at home. They gave narrative shape to their own experiences, and forcefully argued the case for change. Cornelia Sorabjee, Krupabai Sathianadhan, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain are some of those whose writings compel attention. Of these, Cornelia Sorabjee was the daughter of Parsi converts to Christianity, while both Krupabai and Ramabai were Brahmin converts. Rokeya Begum belonged to the Muslim Zamindar community of Pairaband village of Rangpur district of Bengal, now in Bangladesh.

Krupabai Sathianadhan's first novel, *Saguna*, an autobiographical rendering, and her next (which happens to be her last), *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life*, are bold attempts to challenge the oppressive Hindu traditions. Forcefully criticizing the denial of education to girls, Krupabai writes in *Saguna*, "Poor girls! What can we expect from impoverished, stunted minds?" (Sathianadhan 1895:30). In *Kamala*, she approves of the protagonist's defiant attitude towards the constricting traditional norms. Ramabai Saraswati's *The High Caste Hindu Woman* is in the shape of her letters written to her Western friends compiled by Sister Geraldine. She is as bold in assaulting and resisting the Hindu view of woman, as she was bold in her personal life, thoughts and actions and in countering any imposition on her. If

she could reject Hinduism, she could also reject the dominance of the Christian discourse. “I am not bound to accept every word that falls down from the lips of priests and bishops,” she wrote in a letter dated May 12, 1885 (Ramabai, qtd. in Shah 1977: 59). Significantly, both Krupabai and Ramabai showed acumen in choosing the best from Hinduism and Christianity. They displayed respect and strong attachment to the positive aspects of their own culture; they did not discard Hinduism perfunctorily nor did they borrow everything blindly from Christianity, with the result that they became acceptable to the women whose cause they were fighting.

Cornelia Sorabji’s *India Calling* is an autobiographical account of a woman standing at the intersection of two cultures—Parsi and Western, and working for a third—Hindu. *India Calling* structures her own experiences, as well as of those women she helped. More than criticizing the society for women’s problems, Sorabji constructs the lived reality of women’s secluded life, and censures the nationalist leaders for damaging the cause of women’s movements by their purblind decisions. Sorabji stands out as an agent of change and a role model for women. It could be argued that Sorabji, Krupabai and Ramabai were privileged and empowered by their conversion to Christianity that enabled them to present radical views in their texts, but the fact that they retained affinity with their original culture made them convincing and their literature, though not widely read, became the tool for changing the world view of liberal-minded men and women. In her paper “Women, Emancipation and Equality,” Meera Kosambi notes that Ramabai’s motto for women was: self-reliance, self-improvement and participation in public life. Her boldness in articulating her views through her writings is unique for her times. She firmly believed that an oppressive society could never progress:

If anybody asks... why the people of our unfortunate India today have become unenergetic, weak and dependent, we will give them a clear

answer that the reason is the lusterless personality of the women who are reduced to animal-like ignorance, guilelessness and slavery, by the oppression of the selfish, short-sighted men of this country (qtd. in Kosambi 2000:137).

Almost two decades later, in 1905, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's forceful literary piece "Sultana's Dream" was published. It gave a Muslim woman's view of patriarchal domination. Originally written in English and later translated into Bengali by Rokeya herself, "Sultana's Dream" was serialized in *Indian Ladies Magazine* in 1905. This work can be termed the first feminist utopian fantasy of Indian English literature. It describes life in an imaginary country, Ladyland, where women are the rulers. They are brainy, free to move about and to command; men, on the contrary, are the subordinates, meant to keep inside their *Mardana* (as opposed to the *Zenana*, female quarters), and obey the commands of the female rulers. Women's governance is marked by love, compassion and truth. In sum, by showing a complete reversal of the reality, Rokeya Hossain voices her resentment towards *Abarodh*—restrictions—imposed on women by the traditional Muslim society. Interestingly, when her husband read the draft manuscript, he called it "a terrible revenge."⁵ More than a work of revenge it was portentous of a rebellious consciousness; a text much ahead of its time; an articulation of gender sensitivity and the need for change. It may be pointed out here that a large body of Rokeya's literary writing was in Bengali and that she evoked bitter criticism and opposition for denouncing *purdha* and condemning men, and also for "whipping the society." This goes on to prove her undaunted spirit and the shock wave her literature generated.

It would be unfair not to mention Toru Dutt, often hailed as the "first woman writer of English in India" and her "lost novel" *Bianca*.⁶ Despite the fact that it is a short work and has no overt feminist inclination, the novella subtly drew the contemporary readers' attention to the problematic of gender, patriarchal

domination and the uncertainties faced by those who stand at the intersection of two cultures. The novel is, Malashri Lal contends, “exercise in self exorcism” and “an intriguing piece of subterfuge text that obtains form as a significant biography” (Lal 1995: 54). It is also a resistance text in the sense that it can be read as an exercise in “talking back” to authority to re-assert the “self.” That Toru Dutt is punished for speaking up is amply demonstrated by her father’s suppression of *Bianca*. Read closely with reference to Toru’s life in Calcutta, the novel offers a veiled commentary on the socio-cultural realities of women’s existence in nineteenth century India in general and Bengal in particular.

These can be termed as stray cases of representation of resistance. Narrativization of female resistance to the dominant ideology came specifically from the women writers writing in the post-colonial/post-independence India. The post-colonial discourse points to the urge of the decolonized mind not only to ‘de-scribe’ the Empire but also to engage in an emancipatory politics. In the case of gender, it is not enough to conceptualize the female subject simply in terms of coloniality. The question that needs to be asked and the answer sought is (in the context of Bhabha), “what is the relation of the self to the otherness of the self’s own history?” Along with expressing the *difference* the position of ‘self’ and ‘other’ represents, the female writer has to fight her double-colonization to find her voice and empower herself. Woman’s writing has to identify, valorize and empower what hegemony has labeled as passive, powerless and mute. Suheila Nasta observes that female writers in the post-colonial situation have to struggle against both male domination and colonial representation:

The post-colonial woman writer is not only involved in making herself heard, in changing the architecture of male centred ideologies and languages, or in discovering new forms and language to express her experience, she had also to subvert and demythologize indigenous male writing and traditions which label her. (Nasta 1991, xv).

Therefore, feminist criticism probes a text to assess how a work represents women, what it says about gender relations and how it tackles the question of sexual difference.

From the early 1950s, when Indian woman's fiction in English started appearing, to the present, women have been speaking up in tones varying from mild self-castigating introspective to the more overt and strident denouncement of the oppressive hegemonic tactics to subdue women. It would be preposterous to insist that women's literature in totality has protest or dissent embedded in it. The self-effacing, self-sacrificing female still populates the pages, but there are also self-questioning women protagonists struggling to locate their autonomous self, asserting their individuality and rejecting male domination.

For example, some of Kamala Markandaya's novels have a mild undertone of resistance. In *Two Virgins*, Lalitha, the more adventurous and extravert of the two sisters is resentful of her backward family and the constricting village ethos. She makes a dash for the city, explores new pastures and is promptly punished for her defiance. Resistance at political level runs as an undercurrent in *Some Inner Fury*. In the true spirit of nationalism, Mira sacrifices her love for the sake of her motherland. The archetype of "Mother India" as a rallying force, so forcefully propounded during the national movement, continues to dominate many works of Markandaya. Rukmani, the protagonist of *Nectar in a Sieve* is almost Mother India who resists the onslaught of industrialization. To an extent, Sarojini in *Silence of Desire* offers silent resistance to male rationality and Western pragmatism by turning to faith healing. These resisters are, however, not Markandaya's chosen women. It is the "womanly woman," defined by the reformers, the nationalists and the revivalists as an ideal Indian woman who holds Kamala Markandaya's fancy.⁷

Attia Hossain's only novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) provides a Muslim woman's resistance to the constricted, claustrophobic space within the inner quarters. Laila defies

the patriarchal power structure, breaks the rules and creates her own space. The novel is set against the backdrop of the freedom struggle and ends with the partition of the country. The text works at three levels—socio-cultural, political and personal—and holds significant implications for post-colonial/post-modern discourse of resistance. Resistance to the pre-independence politics and to patriarchal restrictions is also presented in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*. It is a Parsi view from Pakistan, whereas the Indian Parsi angle is provided by Dina Mehta's *And Some Take a Lover*. Speaking of the subcontinent, one cannot omit to mention the resistance to religious fundamentalism in Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* (Bangladesh).

Strong notes of resistance, self-assertion and the feminist longing to reclaim the female self is dramatized in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande. The women in the novels of these three novelists are educated, sensitive and middleclass. They are aware and have the ability to tap their inner resources to question injustice. It is interesting to note the modes of resistance and reconciliation operative in the texts: Nayantara's women know what they want, but what they want does not suggest their inner strength. They fight for their freedom and get trapped in another relationship. The writer resists the Hindu traditions, the political scenario, indicting the preference for personal motives over the broader social/political ones, but she lets her characters weaken before personal needs. Divorce and personal freedom is the ultimate in women's assertion of the self in her earlier novels. In her later works, however, her protagonists like Sonali in *Rich Like Us* recognize their strength. Anita Desai's method to resist the oppressive structure is subtler though it can be self-destructive. She lays bare the damaged psyche of her women who visualize freedom within the structure; Desai does not allow them to break the norms. Maya, Monisha, Sita, Nanda, Bim resent being sidetracked, exhibit anger, articulate their feelings and ultimately take their own decision that may

not be termed healthy—Maya and Monisha commit suicide, Sita quits her home for a while and Nanda Kaul withdraws to the hills; Bim rebels but reconciles. This trend to reconcile with life not in a helpless, abject manner but in self-revelatory moments is typical of Shashi Deshpande's heroines. Deshpande thrashes out the issues of woman's domestic life and her failure to live a meaningful existence and finally, without erasing the self, she allows each of her heroines to draw on her inner vision to achieve autonomy. In their maturity lies the vitality of Deshpande's art. It is here that resistance instead of shattering the socio-cultural structure holds the transformative promise.

The scenario changes when we reach Shobha De and Namita Gokhale and many others, including Arundhati Roy. The voice becomes strident, the style is flippant and the language uninhibited. They are creating texts that are marked by the Western concepts of the body, with body as the central issue and its gratification the significant concern. Namita Gokhale's *Paro*, for example, depicts woman's craving from two angles: the unrestrained manifestation of greed and selfish hunger for sex expressed by the liberated Paro juxtaposed with the more covert but equally strong longings of a subdued, lower middle class woman Priya. Since Priya cannot break the expected code of conduct and walk the forbidden path, she indulges in fantasies to get the desired freedom. In *Socialite Evenings*, the higher-class morality is contrasted with middle class values. De presents an outrageous picture of perversions. The question is, can these pass for resistance or rebellion against society? Or are these merely personal obsessions? Writers such as these re-define the 'new' woman who is more open to experiences of sex without qualms, be it premarital, extramarital, queer or even incestuous. Whether or not this trend is crucial to liberation is another question but it certainly shows the march from silence to assertion, from speech to action. Anxiety about "literary patriarchy" (to use Gilbert and Gubar's term) also marks much of Indian women's recent

writing. Women emerge no longer as passive victims of male authorial desire but as powerful figures that can “author” the text as its maternal procreators. By subverting the male-dominated discourse they resist their location in the stereotypical role and thus reject an authoritative resolution. Not content with exploring the centrality of sexual desire in heterosexual relationships, some Indian writers are also turning to bold themes like lesbianism and other perversions. Followed by Shobha De’s *Strange Obsession* and the works of Suniti Namjoshi dealing with lesbian relationships, Manju Kapur too has entered into the field with her recent novel *The Married Woman*.

Still one wonders, who is more emancipated? Nayantara Sahgal’s Sonali (*Rich Like Us*), or her Sim (*The Day in Shadow*); Shobha De’s uninhibited women or Shashi Deshpande’s pragmatic protagonists? If all this can come under the umbrella term resistance, then the canvas provided for resistance and resolution is broad and the recent Indian women’s novels labeled as the voice of the liberated woman make available literary grounds to read the resistant consciousness from many angles. But the problematic is that every novel breaking the societal norms cannot be hailed as such.

The inflow of diasporic writings also provides a variegated picture of resistance. Of the many like Randhawa, Shona Ramaya, Jhumpa Lahiri and others, a major body of fiction comes from Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Divakaruni. Diasporic writers have the advantage (or disadvantage) to stand on the brink of two worlds and to experience two cultures. They are more exposed to influences and have more space to interact. Bharati Mukherjee’s Dimple (*Wife*) is far removed from her later heroines who resist being hyphenated Americans. Her Jasmine (*Jasmine*) appears to resist her native culture at every step and with every bold assertion but all her moves and thoughts border on fantasy; this is corroborated by the author’s claim that her novel is a “fantasy,” but fantasy itself is a mode of resistance.

Divakaruni, Randhawa and many others offer resistance to their “otherization”—as diasporic subjects in the host country they are the “other” being ethnic/Asians; in their native culture which they carry with them, they are the “other” being women. Their resentment can be studied as multifaceted and multi-layered.

Feminist Literary Criticism and Reading Resistance

A significant question needs to be answered here: how does women’s fiction resist patriarchy and how far is the ‘speaking subject’ the authentic voice of the community of women? To answer the first part of the question, resistance is a subtle act and can be expressed overtly or covertly by gestures, actions or mood. Resistance can be lived privately or practiced publicly. As Carla Rice points out in her paper “Between Body and Culture,” resistance can be “open and confrontational, or quietly subversive; it can be humorous and playful or serious and painful; it can be individually motivational or socially organized in group action” (Rice 2002:177). In literature, the author may invest her protagonist with the power and the possibility of resistance; she may reveal it through her actions and interactions; the text may resist the existing norms by the method of subversion, revisionist myth-making or transculturalism. Resistance in fiction falls in the category of the possible rather than real and it may not affect the community of women as such immediately but in the hands of discerning readers—men or women—the fictionalized account may become an agent of change. The salient points in considering women’s resistance in writing concern how women represent themselves and what is the relationship between women’s writing and their place in society/culture. Representation operates within an ideology whereas the system of power and domination work through the mode of representation and misrepresentation. There is a kind of “continuum from misrepresentation to representation,” and

as Eugenia Delamotte et al. observe, along with this continuum “the authors perform one or more kinds of socio-cultural work: creating new social definitions of ‘woman’ or ‘womanhood,’ drawing on socially defined notions about women that are already in place, struggling against constraints such definitions place upon them as writers” (Delamont et. al. 2002:10). Thus they create and combat representation and misrepresentation both in relation to the written representation and political representation. The written text is part of their attempts to think about themselves, to create self-knowledge and to relate to the world through their written word. Representation deals with the relationship between women’s writing and women’s place in society. Writing is a way through which women maintain a sense of intellectual and even spiritual community with one another. Locating and reading resistance in women’s texts is not to arrive at hasty conclusions about obvious or latent/imagined rebellion, but an exercise in sustained investigation to understand the psychodynamics of female creativity and to acknowledge the investment of energy in the self. Recognition of these can lead to recognition of the limitations or the power implied in forms of literary resistance.

Feminism and feminist literary theory provide us tools to recognize literary resistance and determine its history. The ability to resist comes with the knowledge that one can resist and conversely, the belief that ‘one can resist’ is vivified by the consciousness about prior resistances and challenges offered by the earlier generation under similar circumstances. Resistance exists in dialectical interplay with oppression; hence the retrieval of the history of oppression and suppression is of uppermost importance to understand women’s silence and invisibility, and their efforts to combat the dominant discourse. In this direction, the efforts of the feminist research to discover and make available writings of women from earlier times have been of immense value. Michelle Cliff, the Jamaican writer points out

that "...if one does not know one's people have resisted, then it makes resistance difficult" (Cliff 1991:280). Cliff's words stand as much for political resistance as for female resistance in the literary field. Absence of a female tradition was noticed by Simone de Beauvoir when she advocated that women should not dream through the dreams of men, as also by Virginia Woolf for whom the absence of any nurturing female tradition was responsible for women's silencing by male canon.

In its endeavor to establish and analyze women's tradition of writing, feminist literary criticism demonstrated how gender informs historical consciousness and how it constructs a tradition that both challenges and appropriates male tradition. The notion of "difference" entered feminist criticism with the theories of deconstruction and post-modernism. The scope of feminist inquiry shifted to reconceptualize sexual difference. Feminist readings progressed from the text to its author and from thence to culture/society. The aim of a feminist reading is not necessarily to praise or blame, but as Catherine Belsey and James Moore observe in their "Introduction" to *The Feminist Reader* is to "assess how the text invites its readers, as members of a specific culture, to understand what it means to be a woman or a man, and [to] encourage[s] them to reaffirm or to challenge existing cultural norms" (Belsey and Moore 1997:1). Critics such as Juliet Mitchell, Rose and Kofman posited the fact that women, the victims of patriarchy, can have the potential to strike back.

Later feminist literary critics like Elaine Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar, Moers were concerned with writing as a mode of resistance. Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) is an account of women's fiction as a subculture recording female experience. In considering women's writing in terms of 'feminine,' 'feminist' and 'female', Showalter sees the first period termed as 'feminine' as a period of imitation of the masculine model, 'feminist' phase which lasted from 1880s to 1920s, as a phase of feminist protests and demands, and the third period from 1920

onwards as moving progressively towards self-discovery and the exploration of the inner space. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) is an expansive analysis of Victorian women writers in which the authors discuss women's resistance to social and literary constraints in terms of a theory of anxiety of patriarchal influence. Gilbert and Gubar trace women's rage against the restrictive hegemonic social norms. According to Rosemary Jackson the subversive technique in women-centered novels is an effective tool to challenge male-dominated forms. She reads women's fantasy as an act of subversion. In her later writings Elaine Showalter reads four models of difference as presented through the theories of women's writing: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural. The biological theory, drawing on Gilbert and Gubar and the French feminists like Helene Cixous, offers perspectives on the body; the crucial premise of the linguistic model is the difference in male and female use of language, it concerns itself with the theories of Irigaray and others; the psychoanalytic theory focuses on women's psyche; its prominent critics are Cora Kaplan, Annis Pratt, Barbara Rigney, Ann Douglas Miller and Nancy Chodorow who project the dynamics of psychosexual differentiation; the theory of women's culture sees the influence of culture as a collective whole to understand the paradigms of women's writing. Gerda Lerner's "The Challenge of Women's History," in *The Majority Finds Its Past* (1981), Tillie Olsen's *Silences* (1978) and Sheila Rowbotham's *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (1976) speak of woman's culture not as a subculture but as an experience in living in duality.

Towards an Indo-centric View

In the context of India and South Asia, the woman's question has never been exclusively a gender issue but had to contend with class, caste, community, religion and region. That is why

the notion of 'feminism' and 'feminist' have gone beyond the movements for equality and emancipation, and centered on ideology of culture. As discussed earlier, the women's movements in India (which comprises Pakistan and Bangladesh) and Sri Lanka were directed by men, and though women were included as significant to nationalist struggle, they remained inside the traditional ideology and hence both inside and outside the dominant discourse. Women's participation in the socio-political sphere and the emergence of Indian feminism have been studied by scholars such as Radha Kumar, Kumkum Sangari, Suresh Vaid, Kumari Jayawardena and many others.⁷ In the field of literature, significant contribution in the shape of theory and analysis have been provided by Jasbir Jain, Amina Amin, Ashis Nandy, Malashri Lal, Gayatri Spivak among others. While Spivak dwells on deconstruction and Bhabha and Nandy on post-colonialism, Sudhir Kakar offers psychological view of the Indian situation. Jasbir Jain raises the all too significant issue of women's literature as the "literature of silence" and asserts that writing itself is "an act of courage" that affords women the opportunity to move outside the narrow role of man's helpmate or the images of the angel or the witch. "Women as they deconstruct literary forms and politico-social constructs continue to struggle with the ghosts of their fathers and the inheritance of their mothers. And they invite the reader to do the same" (Jain 1996: 8-9). Significantly, "in doing the same," the reader is liable to spot the resisting consciousness in the work.

I wish to discuss here briefly three critical works that focus obliquely on resistance in Indian English writing. Jasbir Jain's *Margins of the Erasure* edited with Amina Amin (1995) takes up the issue of *purdah*, both literal and metaphorical, in the subcontinental novel. *Purdah* denotes seclusion or segregation as well as relegation to the restrictive, oppressive female quarters; it denies opportunities for individual growth. While the essays in the book deal with the concept of *purdah* as such from various

angles, the critics do not miss the novelists' anger or bitterness associated with it. They read how the individual authors have resented and resisted the system through characters or plots. In their Introduction, the editors observe, "nostalgic questioning and the helplessness surface through the fictional structures as do the strategies of subversion and rebellion" (Jain and Amin 1995:xiv). Likewise, Jain's remark in her essay "Erasing the Margins: Questioning Purdah," that while *purdah* denotes restrictive lifestyle, the "movement away from purdah is a movement towards self-identity and freedom' (9), is a pointer towards emerging resistant consciousness at both socio-cultural and literary levels. But discarding *purdah* without relevant change in the social psyche can be traumatic, so too is the case with resistance.

In Malashri Lal's *The Law of the Threshold* (1995), the substitute for the *purdah* is the 'threshold' which has its stringent norms and which the creative writers sometimes try to transgress. The law of the threshold operates at three levels: the first space is the inner room of the household, the second is the threshold itself, and the third is the outside world. Stepping out from each space entails violating the law. Lal shows, in her discussion of the novels of Toru Dutt, Rama Mehta, Ruth Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee, how the narratives have negotiated their writers' march towards identity through the century. Women do show, Lal maintains, muted rebellion in their writing because "the female destiny in India and its expression through *woman positioned in a real*" situation, is "complicit with the community consensus on woman's 'proper' place" (Lal 1995:28. Emphasis in the text). So women have to be cautious to imagine alternatives for themselves.

The special issue of *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* on "Feminism and the Politics of Resistance," edited by Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan discusses the potential for resistance not only in women's literary endeavors but also in fields such as the Indian cinema, publishing, theatre and the print media. Three articles

focus on literature but none is on Indian English literary writings. However, this issue of the journal opens up a vast space to study and understand the recent resistant trends in female psyche. Rajan opines that the masculine yardstick of “heroic” resistance cannot measure women’s resistance. Women survive and get their way and achieve power through tactics like “manipulations within the domestic sphere, the subversions of religious and cultural resources and the deployment of sexuality” (Sunder Rajan 2000: 161).

Works that privilege everyday accommodation/resistance afford new areas of inquiry to understand the continuation and disruption of patriarchal power politics. In her book *Real and Imagined Women*, Sunder Rajan takes up the issue of representation of women. In “Life After Rape” she analyses a Tamil short story by Anuradha Ramanan as a resistance text. *Using the Master’s Tools* by Anuradha Needham reads resistance in African and South Asian writers like C.L.R. James, Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie, Amra Ata Aidoo, and others. She analyses the textual through focus on the historical, personal and political locations of the authors who are all diasporic. Hence the question of location holds significance to understand their position. Mandakranta Bose’s *Faces of the Feminine* offers a kaleidoscopic view of woman’s situation in the culture and her search for self-definition. Works such as these may not analyze literary texts but they illustrate in a fundamental way many facets of women’s lives in the society that may help us understand some aspects of women’s conditioning as portrayed in literature.⁸

Feminist trends in women’s writing seems to have arrived in India despite what Meena Shirwadkar wrote in 1979 that though modern woman, in life, “has been trying to throw off the burden of inhibitions she carried for ages ... a woman on her way to liberation, trying to be free from inhibitions, is rarely seen in Indo-Anglian literature.” Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal “have brought new life to the world of women,” but “the major

trend appears to look back, nostalgically, on the Sita-Savitri type” (Shirwadkar 1979:154).

Contrary to the above view, in the post-feminist, post-independence era women’s writing is moving towards change, accepting “new definitions of space and freedom,” acknowledging difference and the need to express the self (Jain 2001:91). The paradoxical solution to the woman’s question is to be found in the indigenous cultural traditions that have “tremendous potential within them to combat reactionary and anti-women ideas, if we can identify their points of strength and use them creatively. The rejection of the harmful is then much easier than attempts to overthrow traditions totally or attack them arrogantly from outside, as most of us Westernized modernists tend to do ... (Kishwar & Vanita 1999:47).

Representation, resistance and resolution are broad areas of contestation that need to be addressed with cultural framework in mind. We seek answer to Spivak’s questions: Can a subaltern speak? Can the subaltern as female get out of the “shadow” and come to light? Strategies for social change lie at the heart of many of women’s works, which this study seeks to inquire into.

III

Re-contextualizing Resistance

Through close readings of selected texts by women writers, this work seeks to understand the various strategies women novelists adopt to enact resistance and to assess the impact of specific socio-cultural, historical circumstances on the authors’ conceptualization of resistance. Despite ideological and theoretical assumptions, women still remain pushed back into the home, and pushed forward by the exigencies of the time; this ambivalence of their familial and social positioning produces a kind of impasse; resistance identifies such problems

and provides an alternative to look for solution. What it cannot do is to cause a general improvement in the position of women, though it can cogently describe the problem and help the reader gain insights by exploring the literatures and elucidating the mode of operation of resistance in a literary text. Resistance stems from desire, the desire to assert identity, to be “Myself”. This in Fanonian term bears the potential to resist because “when it encounters resistance from the other, self-consciousness undergoes the experience of desire.... As soon as *I desire* I am asking to be considered” (Fanon1967:218). It would be an oversimplification to contend that women in resisting patriarchy succeed in “othering” the dominant power structures. Between their desire to resist and the enactment of resistance, there lies an ambivalent space that the texts inquire into.

In this study, I examine resistance in nine contemporary novels by women writers, analyzing resistance to the situations under several different conditions and through different modes. I attempt to chart the cultural territory in the formation of the resisting consciousness. The study weighs the possibility of women’s potential for increased control over their selves as the point of entry for investigation. The potential for control does not signify any material change in the patriarchal system but it certainly refers to visibility in the public as also in the private spheres. Chapter I, the introductory chapter, has located resistance in the milieu of contemporary ideologies and has made a case for the prospect of voicing resistance which itself is an empowering exercise. It has traced the emergence of resistance in the Indian historical context showing the impact of the nationalist movement on the Indian social and cultural thought. Resistance has been placed in the feminist theoretical perspective, and the surfacing of Indian feminist consciousness has been highlighted so that the approach remains Indo-centric.

Chapter 2 deals with resistance to patriarchy. Patriarchy is the key concept used by feminists. It encapsulates the mechanisms,

ideologies and social structures that have silenced the female and disempowered them vis-à-vis the male. Three novels discussed here are—*A Matter of Time*, *Difficult Daughters* and *Socialite Evenings*. Different aspects of resistance: stoic silence, refusal to react, restless anger, the slow but sure emergence of individualism defying the traditional norms, and the growing sexual awareness as well as perversities are read in these works. Chapter 3, in a way, carries the discussion forward, concentrating on the changed position of the mother—the matriarch—who is no longer deified but is seen as a fallible human being and whose power the protagonists resent. Chapter 4 looks at childhood memories as source of knowledge and resistance. *The God of Small Things* and *Ice-Candy-Man*, recounted from the girl-children's perspectives are analyzed in this chapter. Revisionist mythmaking is one of the potent tools feminists use to counter their silencing and elimination from the dominant culture. How Indian writers are using Indian traditional myths is illustrated in chapter 5 and the two novels discussed are *Thousand Faces of the Night* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*. One of the harrowing actualities of a woman's life is sexual violence and violation that negates her right to her body for which feminists have been fighting their battle. Two novels, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *The Binding Vine* raising their voice against arbitrary male behavior in exercising power over the female body in the form of sadistic attacks and rape are examined in chapter 6. Chapter 7 (added to the second edition) reads two self-narratives: Bama's *Karukku* and Mukhtar Mai's *In the Name of Honour* giving a marginalized perspective. Chapter 8 sums up the findings and discusses how resistance operative in the texts confronts anonymity and offers visibility to the female, both as author and as protagonist. Despite challenging the conventional norms, breaking cultural stereotypes, and visualizing change, the authors resist Western model and demonstrate positive response to the indigenous culture. However, far from invalidating emancipation, their advocacy for a

replacement model envisages a balanced self-making. Theories do not bring in change; the more contextualized understanding of the problem and an open response to the real issues brings it.

In reading resistance in literary texts, one does not and cannot measure the transformative value of a piece of writing, but a pragmatic approach does show the corresponding changes in socio-cultural patterns and their validity as the aesthetically re-created sites of change in literature.

Notes

1. Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash discuss the nature and practice of resistance in their Introduction to *Contesting Power*, focusing on the entanglement of power and resistance. They look at resistance from the angles of gender, production relations, popular culture, and the State and view it as conditioned by the given culture. Resistance has drawn attention of scholars from the fields of history, sociology, political science and anthropology. Of late, the representation of resistance in literary writings is also being explored. It provides another angle to the study of resistance as literature offers an imaginative purview and an exposition of how everyday resistance practices are formulating the narratives. See "Introduction," *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford, 1991: 1-22).
2. Kenneth Frampton uses the term "identity-giving culture" in connection with the modern art forms, which Frampton suggests, have the possibility of cultivating resistance. See Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," qtd. in Joseph Natoli, ed. *Literary Theory(s) Future* (Urbana/ Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989: 311).
3. Foucault uses the term "reverse discourse" to show how the dominated or the subjugated discourse deploys the same vocabulary that relegated or controlled it, to speak for itself and contest its space. He gives an example from the nineteenth century regulatory discourse on homosexuality. The homosexuals advancing their claim for recognition countered the regulations by using the same language the regulatory statement used. The language by which homosexuality was disqualified became the tool for demanding its legitimization.

- See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol. I., trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1980: 101). See also Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988: 66-67) and Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, "Culture and Textuality: Dehalving Cultural Material," *Textual Practice*, 4.1 (Spring 1990: 91-100).
4. Discussing the psychological implications of the loss and recovery of self under colonialism, Ashis Nandy refers to India's ethnic universalism. He analyses the works of Gandhi, Kipling, Aurobindo and Tagore to illustrate how with ethical universalism and spiritualism, the Indian mind coped with and resisted colonial oppression. "The argument that," says Nandy, "when psychological and cultural survival is at stake, polarities [of the universal versus the parochial, material versus the spiritual, the achieving versus the non-achieving and the sane versus the insane] become partly irrelevant, and the directness of the experience of suffering and spontaneous resistance to it comes through at all places. When this happens, there emerges in the victim of a system a vague awakening of the larger whole, which transcends the system's analytic categories and/or stands them on their heads. Thus the victim may become aware that under oppression ... the spiritualism of the weak may articulate or keep alive the values of a non-oppressive world better than the ultra-materialism of those who live in vision-less worlds; and that the non-achieving and the insane may often have a higher chance of achieving their civilizational goal of freedom and autonomy without mortgaging their sanity" (113).
 5. See Bharati Ray. *Early Feminists of Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford, 2002). Ray records the incident thus, as recounted by Rokeya Begum: "We were then stationed in Bhagalpore. My husband was away on tour, and I was left alone at home. He returned after two days and asked me what I had been doing during his absence. I then showed him the draft of 'Sultana's Dream', which I had just written. He promptly read through the whole book without even bothering to sit down, and remarked, 'A terrible revenge!'" (1-2). Originally noted in *Bayuyana Panchash Mile* (Fifty Miles in an Aeroplane) in Abdul Quadir (ed.), *Begum Rokeya Rachnabal* (Dhaka: Bangle Academy, 1933:282).
 6. Malashri Lal provides a detailed discussion of Toru Dutt and her *Bianca*. Lal comments that the novella is written as a novel of manner, much in the style of Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters, but

Lal successfully traces masked rebellion in the story, and an intense exposition of inner life. Lal is one of the very few scholars who have studied *Bianca*, and perhaps the only scholar to offer a feminist critique. See Malashri Lal. *The Law of the Threshold* (Shimla: Indian Instt. Of Advanced Study, 1995: 34-56).

7. Radha Kumar, in her *The History of Doing* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993) gives an account of the movements for women's Rights from 1800 to 1990. She traces the rise of feminism in India and observes: "The Indian feminist movement has long experience of some of the problems which these groups [in Western countries] are dealing with: in particular of tradition and modernity, the constitution of ethnic, religious and community identities and nationalism. We have a great deal to share, not least because our approaches both to these problems and to the issue of democracy are particular. It may be, that were we to do so, we might be able to raise issues of racism, immigration, exploitation, cultural bias et al, which have been so important in our critique of 'the west' and 'western feminism', in a new and more fruitful way." (196). See also *Recasting Women*. It locates, through cultural/political/historical process, the reconstitution of patriarchy in colonial India and feminist historiography, and shows the emerging dialectical relation of feminisms and patriarchies in India. Kumari Jayawardena's *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986) is a study of the emergence of feminism in the Third World countries. It traces feminist history and shows the emergence of the new woman in Third World countries, including India and Sri Lanka.
8. Apart from Sangari and Vaid mentioned above, see Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, *Daughters of Independence* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986). This is an exhaustive study of women in Independent India who are still dogged with the considerations of class, caste and gender. Extracts from personal interviews authenticate their discussion on women and Nationalist movement, women's heritage, their subjectivity, self-sacrifice, resistance and reconciliation. Also see *Ideals, Images and Real Lives*, ed. Maitreyi Krishnaraj and Alice Thorner (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2000); Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis, ed. *Embodied Violence* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996); Jasbir Jain and A.K. Singh, eds. *Indian Feminisms* (New Delhi: Creative, 2001). Various issues of *Manushi*, and Madhu

Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, ed. *In Search of Answers* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999) also take up current issues concerning women and the need to understand Indian women's problems within Indian cultural context at the grass-root level.

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Two

“The Other Foot Out of the Threshold” — Resisting Patriarchy

Cindrella,
What is this?
Why have you stopped?
See, one of your feet is still
Inside the threshold.

....
Set out,
And
Do withdraw at least now
Even the other foot out of the threshold.

—SAROOP DHRUVA
(A Gujrati poetess)

Sita speak your side of the story.
We know the other too well ...
Sita speak!
You who could lift the magic bow in play
With one hand
Who could command the earth with a word
how did they silence you?

—BEENA AGGARWAL

Perhaps the question that feminist critics should ask themselves
is not ‘Is there a woman in this text?’ but is rather ‘Is there a
text in this woman?’

—MARY JACOBUS

Questioning is an integral part of growth; but it is also the first step to resistance. Together they are seen as an insult to authority because the notions of resistance and interrogation emphasize non-compliance to systems of power, pose threat to dominant ideology, and may culminate in being silenced and repressed in their attempt to express agency. In fiction there is the possibility of allowing and showing women exerting their agency, but the accompanying onslaught of nemesis cannot be overlooked. Ibsen’s Nora, Kate Chopin’s Edna and even the (unnamed) protagonist of D.H. Lawrence’s long story may express their resentment at the oppressive domestic and sexual regime and walk out in a resistant gesture and may be extolled theoretically, but their fate is sealed; it is either anonymity, exile or death.¹ The final resolution of crisis is hardly ever in sight. At its core, however, the resistant phenomenon is important primarily as a symbolic mode of action, powerful enough to control the meanings that came to be assigned to it. What we have, then, is not a gap between truth and fiction, but a complex process in the social construction of meaning, a process that has material agents and conditions and effect at every point, and a history that is not without significance. The dominant group fears the resistant’s potential to arrive at a self-determined identity, and the resistant subject is afraid of the dangers of being erased. This ideological struggle is well depicted in some of the contemporary Indian novels by women giving rise to debates on the writers’ inscription of a gendered space and the representation of the emergence of feminist consciousness in India.

The Indian women novelists, particularly of the 1980s onwards articulated woman’s aspirations, her soul-searching and inconsistencies, her professional endeavours, her sexual radicalism, her disapproval of tradition, her newly-formed relationship to man and her changed vision of motherhood². Authors like Shashi Deshpande (*A Matter of Time* and *Small Remedies*); Anita Desai (*Journey to Ithaca* and *Fasting, Feasting*); Arundhati Roy

(*The God of Small Things*); Shobha De (*Socialite Evenings, Sisters* and all her works); Namita Gokhale (*Paro*); Manju Kapur (*Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Woman*); Githa Hariharan (*The Thousand Faces of Night*); and even the diasporic writers such as Bharati Mukherjee, Shona Ramaya, and others have presented various modes of resistance to patriarchal norms. To a varying degree and depending upon the individual writer's position, these novelists thematized the expediency of self-representation, protested against the limitations of women's lives and emphasized on textuality and its uneasy relationship with patriarchy, creating the space for resistance. The process is marked by a desire of woman to regenerate herself. In our socio-cultural value-system, such acts may be conceptualized as transgressions, but as Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan observes, some of these transgressive practices like cross-dressing, or crossing the boundaries from one sphere of activity to another, remaining unmarried, adulterous love and economic independence do not always remain suspect. In time some of them cease to be viewed as transgressions and become socially accepted acts (Sunder Rajan 1993: 71-92). In the present context woman has become the site of contending ideologies and women writers are confronted with the profound paradox of maintaining the balance between progressive vision and cultural specificity. Talking about the representation of gender and culture in the context of Canadian and Indian writing Jasbir Jain asserts that one may transcend the body and its desires or ignore it, but one cannot get out of it:

Gender continues to govern the individual's interaction with society and gender is both a social and cultural construct. In an attempt to understand and redefine the self, the novelist has to re-evaluate the role of sex, of love, of procreation and motherhood and freedom. The differences both in writing and in evaluative strategies are directly related to these cultural situations.

(Jain 2002: 55)

In allowing their protagonists to step out of the patriarchal control, satisfy the claims of their sexuality and savour freedom, Manju Kapur and Shobha De deliberately construct narratives of resistance, but instead of gaining any ideological triumph, the protagonists are made to retreat, with disastrous consequences, into either victimhood or loneliness or compromise with the ordinary. On the contrary, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai display a more subtle and refined handling of anger and resistance. By evolving a balance between traditional demands and modern compulsions, they renegotiate the power relations in an attempt to resolve the crisis. Not that this method always works, but at least the novelists probe the individual consciousness and help deconstruct the hegemonic notions of power. Deshpande in particular lets her women experience the confusing and disturbing silence within, get a glimpse of their inner being and empower themselves to confront the power politics, comprehend the situation and get control on their lives. In that their intention to assert and defy is evident. That is how the novel resisting patriarchy is born. Resistance, however, cannot be enacted in a vacuum; it is governed and controlled by social and cultural constructs because theorizing relationships or showing gendered isolation without contextualizing them would mean running the risk of reductivity.

Of the three novels to be discussed in this chapter, Shashi Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time* (1996) embodies three modes of resistance—silence, rage and balanced rejection; Shobha De’s *Socialite Evenings* (1989) breaks the patriarchal norms with impunity, but the latent sub-textual resisting-voice is perpetually in the process of rejecting ideology in its questioning of both the constrictive middle-class values and the invasive influence of the more libertine culture given to sexual voyeurism. Karuna maps her internal tensions and insecurities with candour and comes back to the folds of her parents; and Virmati, Manju Kapur’s protagonist in *Difficult Daughters* (1998) engages in a struggle

to redefine individual independence as against familial and social opposition, but her efforts to find a space for herself end with her lack-luster marriage and her subsequent compromise with life's protean realities. Only Deshpande's three women characters seem to have symbolically resolved the issue of anger and frustration to an extent—Kalyani makes life tolerable for herself by evolving a strong feminist sense of gender solidarity, identifying with the idea of sisterhood of women, thus destabilizing the victimizing male structure; Aru develops a relationship with her grandmother and learns to look at suffering with stoic acceptance and Sumi decides to stand on her own without indicting Gopal and makes life meaningful. By rejecting social norms and trying to survive the odds, these characters and their authors attempt to create a female space, thus partly achieving their freedom from oppressive patriarchal authority. When Karuna (*Socialite Evening*) asserts with self-determination, "the good thing is me" (306); when Gopal derives his strength from the two women, Kalyani and Aru (246), and when Ida reconstructs her mother's past, we recognize that the writing and re-visioning exercises have not been futile, nor are they mere re-production and repetition of female experiences. By reworking and retelling the tales, the women novelists show the procreative energy of the narrative form to refurbish itself and make women the subject of her-story/history.

The subject position of the authors as well as their protagonists assumes significance when we look at the endings. The endings of the novels under discussion are compelling and vibrant. In *A Matter of Time*, Gopal (the male) derives his strength from the two females he sees standing at the threshold of the Big House "Vishwas" bidding him farewell:

If it is indeed true that we are bound to our destinies, that there is no point struggling against them, even then this remains—that we do not submit passively or cravenly, but with dignity and strength. Surely, this, to some extent, frees us from our bonds (246).

By balancing her rhetoric and mimetic aims Shashi Deshpande gives emotional direction and effect to her works and achieves a formal wholeness. Shobha De’s *Karuna* sounds assertive in her decision to write her story and the “Epilogue” in third person narrative voice gives her the much-needed strength. The last line reads, “Tomorrow’s anxieties could be dealt with late, to day, she would rest” (306). But before the Epilogue, she concludes her first-person narrative with vigor. Here, her tone is flippant as if De is flinging the master’s language back at him as she says:

‘I think it’s a great idea. In fact, I think I’ll steal it. There may be a documentary in it but I’m going to give a book a shot. I’ve always wanted to write one—so you can go take a walk, Yankee agent. I know when I’m on to a good thing and the good thing is me. If any one is going to cash in on this, baby, it isn’t going to be you. Thanks for the lead though. I’ll try and write you in somewhere. Nothing major, may be a paragraph or two. Now get lost, I have work to do. The opening lines will read, “I was born in a dusty clinic in Satara, a remote village on the outskirts of Maharashtra...” (306)

The language and the use of an assertive tone have the flamboyant energy of a fundamentally determinant subject who has taken upon herself the radical and complex responsibility to dismantle the structure of ideology that has silenced women and to replace the male voice with an authoritative female voice. This exercise in self-making is going to focus on the denials and the gaps in the female history. The same force is in Ida’s resolution. Ida traces the history of her mother (*Difficult Daughters*) and retrieves her mother’s past across the barriers of gender and culture and after encoding the history repossesses the authority of the subject-position. She owns the responsibility of making the “mansion” by sieving “the muddled, partial and contradictory” material and reconstructing her life (258-9). The three texts question patriarchal norms to reach at their final resolution, though each approaches the problematic in a fundamentally different manner. The question of resistance assumes metaphysical

significance in *A Matter of Time* and directs the narrative to the all-too-significant problem of “becoming”; in *Socialite Evenings*, the novelist critiques the stance of counter-morality and allows the protagonist a chance to self-questioning by endorsing Karuna’s return; Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* provides a bitter commentary on shattered dreams of a valiant but misled young girl by problematizing the role colonization of mind plays in bringing back the story closer to its cultural context.

II

A Matter of Time opens with a graphic but somewhat saddening description of the ‘Big House’, named “Vishwas” with roots deep in the historical past, where the future drama will be enacted. It is to this house Sumi returns with her daughters after Gopal’s desertion and helps unravel the history of the house and its three generations of masters and mistresses. Gopal quits a long-standing marriage and decides to walk out—not for the proverbial ‘other women’ but because of ennui, an existential *angst*. His decision and desire to leave the householder’s life is substantiated by the epigraph to the first section of the novel, a line from the Brhadarankya Upanishad, “‘Maitreyi,’ said Yajnavalkya, ‘verily I am about to go forth from this state (of householder)’”. Through Gopal-Sumi incident the author works out an entire patriarchal structure that has generated the whole value-system. One questions the efficacy of a man—the male—shedding his responsibilities and setting out in search of his ‘self’, only to encounter his argument that women do not need to go out in search of the ‘self’ because they are fulfilled through child-birth. “... for a woman, from the moment she is pregnant, there is an overriding reason for living, a justification for life that is loudly and emphatically true. A man has to search for it, always, forever” (68). This is how the male is condoned his desertion, he is exonerated and the entire burden of family falls

on the woman. Slowly, the author gives us a peep into the past of a whole generation of silent, suffering, tolerant women who choose to resist when life becomes choiceless and unbearable.

Sumi, along with their three teenaged daughters, shifts to her parental home. The four females, left baffled, angry, indifferent and mute, each according to her reaction to the reality, try to adjust to the situation, and during this period of adjustment—both physical and psychological—they encounter the past, layer after layer. Aru, the eldest daughter is more observant, angry and restless. She is, the author remarks, “the focal point” of the novel. (Ramarao 1998: 257). She has a legion of questions—Why is her grandmother, Kalyani, so oppressively silent? Why is there no communication between her grandparents? Why has their father left? What will the future hold out for them? And so on. The mystery unfolds slowly and Aru understands the enigma of women’s subdued anger, their strength to endure and women’s subordinated existence in the patriarchal set-up.

The most potent symbol of patriarchy in the novel is the house “Vishwas,” built “by a man not just for himself, but for his sons and his son’s sons” (3). It is “built to endure” (3) and it has endured. The Big House is solid and hoary with history; it has a façade imposing in its simplicity, and an interior foreboding in its grimness. It is its gloominess and schizophrenic character that Aru resists and seeks to probe. She succeeds to an extent in bringing a semblance of freshness and joy to the house by her vivaciousness and her curiosity. She unlocks its many vault-like rooms full of dark secrets, both literally and metaphorically. That the novel should open with an elaborate description of the house built by a man for his sons (not daughters), and end with the two female inheritors of the house—Kalyani and Aru—standing at its threshold bidding farewell to a male (Gopal), is in itself a deconstructive strategy adopted by Deshpande. In his interesting analysis of houses and homecoming in Shashi Deshpande’s works, Pier Paolo Piciucco observes that women are not “as

subject to houses as men are” because women are strong enough to survive in another place, but the “family house is the place where women can record their lives” and “move importantly, it is the longed for space where they can live without men, even if only for a short period” (Piciucco 2001:34-42).

‘Vishwas’ is bare and barren. Inside, it has an eerie presence of the past and is inhabited by a divided family—Shripati and Kalyani—who have not communicated with each other for thirty-five years; outside, nothing “has ever grown or will grow on the hard unyielding ground” (3). The house sometimes throbs with life when Premi or Goda and others come to see Kalyani. Even then the atmosphere is muted; it is one of hushed voices and suppressed laughter for fear of the master of the house. The author, however, is not comfortable with the divide; she looks for reconciliation. In one of her interviews she remarks that her works are about our “inner lives and our outer lives and the reconciliation between them” (Holmstrom 1998: 249). Reconciliation, which may make the family whole, is what Aru also looks for in the novel and Deshpande ingeniously searches for. At one place the author allows Sumi to brood over the concept of a whole and healthy family after Hrishi’s remarks that there are too many “females” in the house:

They’re right, Sumi thinks now, both Gopal and Hrishi, there’s something wrong about a house with only females³/₄or males. It’s too lopsided, not balanced enough. There’s already a change in our behaviour; there’s a carelessness that lies, like a thin overlay of dust, over our lives. And ease, too, there’s too much of it. There’s none of the tension that’s necessary to make us feel alive, to give us the excitement of living (60).

Too many females! Like the “Zenana.” This simple thought leads to another link. Could this be the reason for Gopal’s desertion because his wife is unable to give him a son? Is it Gopal’s resistance that Shashi Deshpande is hinting at? Probably not! Deshpande is too astute an artist to so brazenly initiate

an obvious issue and sidetrack the main thrust of her story—women's subordination, their endurance and strength. It cannot be denied though that the lack of male child keeps hovering over the work and much of the insecurity and oppression of the female characters is directly connected to this lack. That this problem turns into a dilemma can well be summed up in Jasbir Jain's word "families that rest on the silent resentment of these women have their own ghosts to live with (Jain 2003: 65).

The novel does more than just narrate a tear-soaked tale of suffering and endurance. First, it subtly shows the difference between the values ascribed to stereotypical male and female traits in which men's needs take precedence over women's. Second, it depicts the many faces of female resistance that make survival in the hostile world possible. To take up the first issue, let us have a look at the two male characters¾ Shripati and Gopal. Both leave the domestic spheres because they cannot cope with life's commitment. Marriage makes demands, it requires "a lifetime of commitment" (69) and it was not possible for both to stand up to that. The ascerbic question Aru asks Gopal can also be asked to Shripati, "Why did you marry? Why did you have children?" (68). Gopal has an unexplained existential drive and he leaves everything behind, including a happy family. Shripati shuts himself up against all communication because of frustration, anger and despair. For him nursing his suffering self is far more significant than caring for his wife. He forgets or rather he does not want to understand and acknowledge that the grief of having lost the son is not his alone; it is Kalayani's as well. By severing all ties, even speech with her, he tortures her doubly.

Thus, by running away from the battlefield of life, the two men try to escape their duties and responsibilities towards their families. Gopal leaves, as he tells Premi, because he has lost faith in life. "I could no longer believe that there is a meaning to my life, a happy culmination waiting for me at the end of it" (134). Shripati withdraws from life to punish Kalyani.

Although *The Gita* upholds the principle of non-attachment, it does not advocate running away. The very basis of its tenets is action, as it exhorts Arjuna to face the battlefield. Let us, in the circumstances have a look at the reality of Gopal and Sumi's life: Gopal leaves his family in the mid-current—his three daughters are in their teens (a difficult period for growing up adolescents), his wife Sumi is not employed in any job and is economically ill-equipped to face the day to day requirements, his in-laws, though economically sound, have their own problems. Did he ever give a thought to all these? The burden of his decision falls on Sumi, his three daughters and Kalyani. As Aru tells him, his going away thus has meant for them “the feeling of displacement, the questions and innuendoes they have to face, the sense of shame and disgrace” (62). Ironically, “shame”, “disgrace” and “questions” are for the women to face and answer, if they can. Shashi Deshpande is acutely aware of the double standards of the culture; she interrogates it in her short story “The Inner Room” by subverting Amba's tale of her woe and rejection to show how in men's quest for “honour,” the woman is trapped in a position of no return. Man is not the deserter; it is the woman who is ‘deserted.’³

From this perspective, critics who read the novel as a post-colonial discourse, confirm the narrative as a mode of women's experience “underlining its resistance, subverting and undermining the traditional hierarchies” (Guttal: 2003:54-63);⁴ those who focus on the novel's feminist overtones, see it as a story of betrayal and oppression. Critics such as Jasbir Jain, taking an all-inclusive view, and placing the novel within the entire corpus of Deshpande's oeuvre, and the socio-cultural milieu extol the novel as a novel of “becoming”, which necessitates not only a “readjustment” but also “introspection” (Jain 2003: 272-3). It would, indeed, be restrictive and one dimensional to study the problem posed by the plot as “woman's problem;” even the author would not approve of being “slotted” as a woman writing

about women (Dickman 2001: 131).⁵ Though the crisis begins with one man’s decision to walk out on his family the novel lays bare the entire socio-cultural-historical matrix. The centralist position women hold in the novel because of the narrational focus gets dislodged when wider metaphysical, historical and psychological implications come up. The various resistant perspectives require to be redefined and recontextualized. How do we see speech vs. silence, *sanyasa* vs. *Grihastha*, life vs. death, crime vs. punishment, individual vs. history, and above all resistance vs. resolution/accommodation?

Shashi Deshpande predominantly depicts resistance to positioning and to the social order at individual level—Kalyani’s silent resistance to the gendered abused relationship, Aru’s vocal resistance to her father’s authority to take one-sided decision, and above all Sumi’s covert resistance to the situation she is placed in. The novel does not dwell overtly on social domination and on historical situation though there is a strong undercurrent of resistance to silencing as the author builds a feminist critique of historically privileged texts. During her explorations, Aru happens to come across the saga of one Yamunabai, a woman who dared to have a “vision, a vision in which girls and women would not have to live with nothing more in their lives than the slavery of endless drudgery and child bearing” (187). Yamunabai made endless efforts for girls’ education; she defied male authority; persuaded parents to send their daughters to her school; she started her classes in “the dung-smelling cattle shed,” and later succeeded in establishing a school that came to be called Yamunabai Pawar High School for Girls. This discourse of a woman’s fight for girls is in itself a re-examination of history and an apt reminder of the resistance to patriarchy given by women like Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, Anandibai Joshi, Janakka Shinde in the mid and late nineteenth century Maharashtra. In dealing with history, Deshpande becomes an “agency reinstating and revising knowledge and attitude that are socially constructed”

and thus becomes an instrument of resistance to invisibility (Lopez 2002: 35).

Resistance to male viewpoint of history comes from the omniscient author who finds women conspicuous by their absence from the annals of Vishwasrao's family history of migration. Deshpande uses the technique of highlighting the information/observation by placing it in parenthesis—"of women, there is nothing. They are only an absence, still waiting to be discovered, something that only Aru will notice later. But that is altogether another story, it has no place here" (95). With the tempo built and curiosity heightened, Deshpande lets the reader wait till she has worked out the possibility of exploiting the use of myth and history to determine the nature of the history of the "heroic" men, the owners of the house "Vishwas." Kalyani likes to believe the myth of Vishwasrao's greatness as Peshwa's right hand man; Gopal has his doubts and he sees many "holes and inconsistencies" in Kalyani's theory; Aru on the other hand discovers the skeletons in the locked rooms of history. The interplay of myth and history creates urgency at the interpretative level to read between the variable context and record female experience from the perspective of the present realities of the family. Women in the family may have been absent from history but women of the family have created their own history. Historians, Deshpande observes, are like magicians, deft at creating and perpetuating personalities, at image making:

Historians, even the most brilliant of them, especially the most brilliant of them, are like magicians. With flamboyance they draw your attention to what they want you to see, take it away from what they want to conceal. 'Look!' they will say, 'the Queen of Spades.' And you see the Queen of Spades. All else is concealed in the darkness of a deliberate deceit (99).

While Kalyani perpetuates the given picture, the author's programmed narrative strategy builds a complex web of the past and the present and fills in the empty spaces. Through

the power of imagination, the novel re-constitutes not only the work of a long-forgotten activist, Yamunabai, but also provides the glimpses of a “veiled truth” about the gendered perspective of the family that has erased women’s signature from its history and also silenced them. There is, however, an aesthetic tension between what Kalyani likes to live by, that is, her own version of history and what Aru assumes is left out; this tension shapes the text by relocating the historical process with contemporary familial-social conditions. The author allows Kalyani the pleasure of having “her own idea” about the family history because depriving her of it would mean, taking away her “self”. Humans have a peculiar and complex relationship with the past. “Whether we are resisting it, reliving it, ignoring it, or trying to recreate it—all these things often at the same time—we are always, in some way, trying to reshape our desires. Therefore, this idea of ‘oneself’ is, actually, what we want ourselves to be” (100). What Deshpande states can also be substantiated by what theorists try to establish. Rita Felski feels that the literary text, the historical process and the complex cultural formations of beliefs, myths and their representation have an aesthetic relationship, which cannot be theorized but which can be read aesthetically to avoid reductivity:

To simply read literary texts in terms of their fidelity to a pre-given notion of female experience or feminist ideology is in effect to deny any specificity to literature, language and meaning, rendering literature redundant, reducing it to a purely documentary function (Felski 1989:8).

The novel is so intelligently created that its historical and metaphysical ambience resists facile interpretation. The entire structure is based on the metaphysical construct of the society. Divided in three parts—‘The house’, ‘The Family’ and ‘The River’—the plot is woven around the history/ “her” story at the mundane level but as each part is supported by an epigraph, each from the *Upanishads* (*Brhad-arnayaka* and *Katha Upanishd*),

it acquires metaphysical overtones. First, it is the ancient view of Indian culture: Yajnavalkya leaves his householder's life but before doing so he initiates Maitreyi into the esoteric knowledge and thus empowers her. The author subtly shows, without comments and only through hints that deterioration of woman's condition came much later as the epigraph to the section 'The Family' insists on the significance of the son:

Whatever wrong has been done by him, his son frees him from it all; therefore he is called a son. By his son a father stands firm in this world (91).

In the third section, it is Nachiketa who has the honour of being addressed by Yama, not Savitri, though Savitri had an equally vigorous debate with Yama as Nachiketa had. It is thus, the male-oriented metaphysical milieu in which women have to fight their battle. In section I, Gopal is exonerated because he, like Yajnavalkya, tells Sumi of his intention and does not desert her suddenly; in section II, the importance of a male heir is implicit. Inability to give birth to the male child poses threat to the very existence of women; in section III, death becomes the leveler—be it the formidable patriarch Shripati or the much-wronged Sumi, both travel through the same 'River'. That life should be cut short when it was being streamlined is an irony of fate, a matter of time and Deshpande knows the futility of resistance at this level.

At the thematic level, however, resistance works in three distinct modes. Aru, just eighteen and restless voices her resistance more vociferously than the others. Her father's desertion hits her the hardest. She cringes from social stigma and the myriad unanswerable questions. She quarrels with her mother for not asserting herself by taking a stand to stop Gopal. Aru visits Gopal several times on her own trying to probe him and when unsuccessful, she wants to punish him by taking the help of law. Feminists today are fighting to ensure gender justice by

law reforms and introduction of suitable family law (Parashar 1997: 199-229). Aru is aware of the law in general but she does not understand its implications that the law will be of no help in the case of her father who has forsaken everything, even relinquished his job. Surekha, the feminist lawyer understands this and dissuades Aru from pursuing the case for alimony. In Aru’s resistance the author shows the viewpoint of the younger generation. Though not yet mature, Aru still is aware and she can be perceived as a representative of the new woman. Ann Heilmann in her discussion of the New Woman Fiction observes that while the first wave feminists “*defined the problem*” of women, the New Woman “*defined herself*, positioning herself within the larger feminist movement and generating a critical analysis of patriarchy” (Heilmann 2000: 42). Resisting the position she is placed in, Aru prepares to “define herself” and evolve a critique of hegemonic dominance.

Kalayani, (Sumi and Premi’s mother) is a victim of the power game and she resists it with her impenetrable silence. First, it was her mother, Manorama, who considered her a curse because Manorama wanted a son not the girl-child she was burdened with. Moreover, Kalyani did not fulfill any of her mother’s dreams: she was neither beautiful nor bright; and then, she had adopted the strategy of resisting her mother’s dominance by her stoic silence. Her silence is like a rock as Surekha, the feminist lawyer finds later, it is “so dense and hard that... words bounce back...” (211). In desperation, Manorama marries Kalyani to her brother Shripati (Kalyani’s maternal uncle) to keep the property within the family, much against Kalyani’s wishes. After Shripati stops all communication with her, Kalyani does not react with the usual show of emotions. She resists him by building her own cocoon, having her sister Goda, and her daughters, Premi and Sumi, and their families in and around the house. It is female solidarity that saves Kalyani from psychological debacle. As psychologists like Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan and others⁶

assert, when romance fails or marriage does not function, women replace sexual passion with female friendship, turn to rescue work for needy women, or adopt the spiritual idea of the sisterhood of woman (as against the brotherhood of man). In feminist fiction, resistance to the marriage text thus remains unchallenged because the sisterhood motif becomes an acceptable substitute. In the context of the novel, it is Shripati who is confined to his room and who leads a solitary existence, not Kalyani.

This does not, however, mean that Kalyani does not suffer. We can read the suffering self of the one who has known the hurt of desertion. In a rare moment of weakness, she shows her emotions to Gopal, "Gopala, let this not happen to my daughter what happened to me" she says. The author, however, does not want Kalyani to cringe, to show her vulnerability, to speak of her pain. She gives Kalyani's right to live by her own truth, her own "jottings in the margin," her own version of history and the right to guard her "truths" stoically. Silence can be a powerful tool of resistance when it practises a lack of participation in the social power relations. Critics observe that within the context of women's speech silence has many faces. Silence is categorized as the will to say or to unsay. Kalyani's resistance is so hard that even the author remarks in one of her interviews that Kalyani does not appear to Aru "as a victim but as a woman come out of all that victimization intact" (Ramarao 1998: 256-59). When silence becomes deliberate it acts as a barrier to the penetration of the self by a perceiver, it works as an operation of power rather than powerlessness. As it withholds communication it produces a kind of awe and becomes a potent tool of resistance. Deshpande valorizes Kalyani's individualistic, dogged resolve to resist her torturer and survive on her own terms.

Let us now take into consideration Sumi's resistance because the novel is primarily based on her problem. Sumi accepts Gopal's decision mutely and seemingly without protest. Arguably, her protest would not have availed much; we realize this when

we encounter Gopal’s tight-lipped attitude to all those who make efforts to bring him back. Sumi was aware of Gopal’s resolve, and the impossibility of reclaiming him. She, therefore, decides to accept his wish with dignity and strength. She does not rave or rant. Instead, to Aru she tells firmly that she is not interested in punishing him (Gopal). “I just want to get on with my life ... Let him go, Aru, just let him go” (61). A closer look at Sumi’s refusal to react to Gopal shows not a passive acceptance of man’s supremacy but a contestation, a critique of tradition. The novelist upholds this point when in an interview she asserts, “Sumi’s acceptance is not passive. She blocks out the unpleasantness. She has a good opinion of herself, she is more concerned with getting on with life. She does not want pity; she would do anything for pride. She distances even her husband” (Ramarao 1998: 256). She decides to resist his decision by living her own life, by reclaiming her own identity. Not willing to live off her parents, she searches for a job, spends her free time in gardening and writing and directing a play for her school. Significantly, her play upholds woman’s resistance through the story of the gardener’s daughter (this shows focus on subaltern) and the display of female sexuality through her next play on *Shurpanakha*. As she gets a better job opportunity, she takes her own decision to accept the offer to go to *Devgiri*. She meets Gopal several times during the year they stay apart and there is no rancor in her, no acrimonious debates follow. They meet, they talk, and she gives him news of the daughters, speaks freely of her life and leaves Gopal wondering at her vivacity. “There is a sparkle to Sumi” (223), he thinks as Sumi reminisces their past:

Do you remember, Gopal—I’m sure you do, though we have never spoken of it after that day—what you said to me the night I came to your room, the night we decided to get married? You said that at any time if either of us wanted to be free, the other would let go. We are not going to be tied together, you said. No handcuffs, you said. And I agreed. I was only eighteen then ... [But], it meant nothing to me

then. How can you think of separating, of wanting to be apart, when you are eighteen and in love? (221).

Interestingly, now that Sumi confronts the past without tears or bitterness, it is Gopal who longs to possess her. His thoughts revert to her body and he looks sick with craving. Sumi tells him triumphantly of her decision to take up her new job at Devgiri boarding school and thus completes the picture of resistance. Gopal admires her strength, and as readers, we feel relieved at this pragmatic negotiation of relationship. The novel ends upholding human dignity in suffering. After Sumi's death Aru and Kalyani wave Gopal good-bye with smiling faces, hiding their immense grief, uncertainty and vulnerability.

Though the three women are victims of patriarchy, they reclaim their identity by their acts of resistance: Aru tries to reposition her lost situation by angry protests; Sumi regains her identity when her merit as an individual is recognized; and Kalyani feels empowered when Shripati's Will, referring to her as Manoramabai and Vithalrao's daughter and not as his wife, is read out to her. She does not feel the sting of having been robbed of her marital status. "On the contrary, it is as if the words have given her something more than the house, restored something she had lost; they seem, in fact, to have strengthened her" (245). It is her lost identity, her individuality that she finds ultimately.

Before we end, it would be interesting to throw a glance at some other works of fiction dealing almost with identical situations. In Anita Desai's short story 'Surface Texture', Harish, tired of householder's life, disappears suddenly leaving his wife and children in a mess. His wife weeps and curses and goes to her parents, and is forgotten. It is Harish's story that interests the author. Arun Joshi's novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* has Billy who flees the society with ennui at the artificiality of modern existence and seeks refuge with the tribals. His wife takes the help of the agency of law to bring him back; Billy dies in an

encounter. Mannu Bhandari’s short story ‘Akeli’ also recounts the pathetic tale of Soma Bua whose husband walks out of the house after their son’s death, leaving his wife alone. He goes to Haridwar and comes for a month every year.

A visible change is discernible in the fiction of the last two decades of the 20th century. In Sudha Narvane’s Marathi story, ‘Betavarcha Manus’ (An Islander) the husband goes to Pondicherry to lead life of a Sanyasi after the tragic death of their son. Alone and lonely, the wife once meets a middle-aged bachelor and their friendship flowers into love. For a while she feels the pressure of her traditional conditioning and argues if pursuing her new friendship she was not doing something sacrilegious; soon she counter-argues, gets over her fear and decides to lead her own life instead of weeping and wailing for a man who does not care for her. Similarly, in Sujata’s Telugu story ‘Liberation’ Venkat Rao leaves his wife. She feels relieved and happy at her single status. The story ends with the woman’s strong resolves:

It may take a while for me to end my role as Venkat Rao’s wife and realize who I am and what my nature is but that’s all right. The wings you had clipped will sprout slowly. After putting the horrible past lived with you behind me, no matter whether I get back to my lost studies or make a living by making appalams, I only know that golden days are ahead ... (Sujata 1992:102). The story, which is in the form of a letter ends with, “Once upon a time, the slave at your feet.”

Such subtle acts of resistance offer a critique of the oppressive structure and the need for change.

In Shashi Deshpande, however, the resistance is rather subdued, more culturally oriented. She allows her female characters a chance to experience self-discovery thus saving the novel from being melodramatic or overtly feminist. To Deshpande feminism is a matter of theory, while writing is to discover our own feminism through our own experiences. She subscribes to the view that theorizing a literary creation to relocate it in the historical process and to give it a contextual, meaning is an arbitrary act,

which hints at reductively. The truths of literary discourse and the historical and temporal situation are to be grasped with creative imagination so that the complex socio-historical beliefs and realities shape the narrative without being untruthful to the value and limitations of literary representation. She is a votary of living within human relationships and her protagonists may not be very brave heroines, as critics assert, they are strong women struggling to find their own voice.

III

If Shashi Deshpande problematizes resistance in the metaphysical, historical and social context, Manju Kapur articulates the nature of female desire in *Difficult Daughters* by subverting the rigid social gender norms and exploring her protagonist's struggle for self-determination. Set mainly in pre-partition Punjab, the novel foregrounds the story of Virmati, a young woman who dares the patriarchy and suffers for her transgressions. Historically, it is the time when the country is fighting colonialism at political and cultural levels. In the context of the novel, Virmati in particular and some other young, enthusiastic women in general, are defying the colonization of their 'being'. Albeit, national politics is not central to Virmati's struggle because her fight is more in the nature of a personal/familial encounter. But still, the impact of the national movement, located at the intersection of history, cannot be underestimated. Usually, when the collective struggles of revolutionary or nationalist nature appeal for participation from subalterns and women, it is anticipated that changes in the ideological perceptions would take place. Since the so far dominated are brought out into public life, they cannot be kept out of the mainstream action, nor is it possible to block out awareness. This point is well elucidated by Vasantha Kannabiran and K. Lalitha in their study on the women's role in Telangana people's struggle. Calling such circumstances as "magic time,"

they discuss how social and historical circumstances produce awareness among women who see in such eventful times "an opportunity" to transform their "hitherto powerless and invisible" existence (Kannabiran and Vasantha 1989: 183).⁷ This applies suitably to the situation of the younger generation women in the novel, like *Virmati*, *Shakuntala* and *Swarna Lata*.

In the wider cultural contexts, movements like the *Arya Samaj* in the North, *Brahmo Samaj* in Bengal and the East, and the "stri-shiksha" abhians in other parts of the country were exerting for women's education and its beneficiaries were girls from the urban middle-class; to add to this, Gandhi's call to women to come out of their domesticity brought the younger generation women into the public sphere. But Gandhi's essentialism, fearing that Indian women may lose their cultural moorings under the influence of 'modernity', defined their political roles within domestic power. His idea that women should completely identify themselves with their husbands and through them identify themselves with the world created ambivalent situation for women. The hegemonic structure was scared of making "public" what was "private," and so it anxiously took the clue and circulated concepts like the 'bhadramahila', and extolled the elevated status of Indian womanhood as purer and higher than the 'Western woman' and tried to keep women rooted to subalternity. Discussing how the rhetoric of Indian womanhood versus the Western woman worked towards the formation of nationalist thought on Indian nationalist feminism, Julie Stephens observes that "erasing the west" came to be a "prerequisite of subjecthood and liberation" because the term Western, including the 'western woman' had "negative associations". (Stephen: 101). It cannot, however, be denied that women's participation in the anti-colonial nationalist movement helped in the process of subject formation through small oppositional acts with their emphasis on resistance rather than on the issues of larger forms of emancipation and liberation.

Moving within this milieu are Kasturi, Lajwanti, Ganga and a whole line of subdued, submissive women for whom life was a simple arithmetic—marry, nurture and never question male authority. In their view “a woman’s *shaan* is in her home” (13) and marriage is the ultimate goal. The second set consists of the ‘new’ women—Virmati, Shakuntala, Swarna Lata. They are motivated by the freedom struggle. For them there is immense satisfaction in leading their own life and being independent. Shakuntala is an epitome of the ‘new’ woman who rides horses, smokes, plays cards and badminton, acts without her mother’s advice, buys anything she wants and above all, ‘she never seemed to question or doubt herself’ (15). Though Shakuntala represents the thoroughly Westernized woman, dreaded and discarded by the nationalists, she becomes Virmati’s role model; she is no longer the “poor unmarried elder cousin” to be pitied, but a self-confident young woman to be emulated. She exhorts Virmati, “times are changing, and women are moving out of the house, so why not you?” (16). Thus inspired Virmati fights her way through life. In the third generation, her daughter Ida, the product of independent India represents the uninhibited, independent and self-assured woman. For Ida, resisting patriarchy or defying the mother means just “living for herself.” Psychologically Ida pays a heavy price for always defying her mother, which shall be discussed in the next chapter. To expiate the wrong, she embarks on a quest to know her mother’s past, she reconstitutes her mother and lives through reliving her. This occasions self-validation and therapeutic effect through writing as also empowerment by using the master’s tool to oppose the dominant discourse.

Like Ruth Jhabvala’s protagonist of *Heat and Dust*, Ida, too, goes through the process of digging the past of her mother with the help of the historical records, newspapers, letters, interviews with her mother’s relatives and visits to Lahore and Amritsar where her mother had lived and studied. The narrative strategy

of exploration and the involvement in going through the past enriches her own perception and gives authenticity to the work. The national and social events are reflected through the personal and the familial. While resistance becomes the motif of Virmati's life, it also gains meaning through the national perspective. Discussing the role played by the small acts of opposition and defiance in redefining the anti-colonial/anti-imperial movements and their impact on the subalterns, Robert Young observes that women's participation in the national movements was oriented toward socialized activities and small, unending sequences of battles, but the retrieval of the histories of these acts is important to understand the “large-scale accounts of liberation struggles” because these histories open up the “possibilities for different ways of writing the history of the anti-colonial movements” (Young 2001:357). That Virmati, Swarna Lata, Miss Dutta and Shakuntala should resist marriage, opt for education, participate in the political activities and wear Khadi amply demonstrate how women developed the narratives of political position and helped the political process by their “small” acts of opposition and resistance.

At personal level, Virmati's silent resistance begins with her unenviable position at home. As an eldest sister, she is burdened with family responsibilities. “Ever since Virmati could remember she had been looking after children,” so starts chapter II of the novel. She is almost a second mother to her younger siblings: strict, harassed and tired. Many a time she would protest, “Why can't Indumati also take responsibility? Why does it always have to be me?” (6). She resents her mother's pregnancies because those bring sarcastic remarks from Lajwanti and others, embarrassing Virmati. For Kasturi bearing eleven children is not an easy proposition, she is always tired and irritated and though she laments being so “trapped” by nature, she cannot talk it over with her husband because of socio-culture-imperatives. Feminist critics often comment on Indian women's defeatist approach in silently

accepting their suffering. Mody and Mhatre in their article “Sexual Class in India” opine that Indian women are simultaneously capable and incapable of speaking up and taking a stand because “the public voice [of the Indian woman] has long been stifled” by a male dominated society (Mody and Mhatre 1975:55). Kasturi who cannot question or contest the male will because that would be outrageous is unable to sympathise with her daughter Virmati’s repudiation of the traditions, and her demand for space for herself. Such insolence leaves Kasturi appalled. We can see an interesting dichotomy here. When Virmati proudly tells the Professor’s wife, “My mother, my masi, all studied. It is the *rivaz* in our family... Even now my father keeps getting my mother books and magazines to read” (36), she voices unconsciously, the patriarchal side of the story. But when she repudiates marriage and insists on her further education, she is trying to articulate her own belief in women’s possible emancipation. It cannot be termed her feminist stance because in the pre-independence era of the 1940s it was too early to think of feminism in India, but the pioneering mood of the nationalist movement and the ideas of women’s education provided an impetus to independent thinking.

Resistance to patriarchy starts with Virmati’s insistence on education, her mother’s rejection of the idea as preposterous, and Virmati’s fight to get her right. Shakuntala’s visit provides her inspiration and plants the “seeds of aspiration” in Virmati (17). She resolves, “No, she too had to go to Lahore, even if she had to fight her mother who was so sure that her education was practically over” (17). Infact, part of Virmati’s character is revealed to Ida when her maternal aunts and uncles (Masi and Mama) tell her about their sister. The remarks are revelatory and hence are reproduced below:

“You know, our mother was always sick, and Virmati, as the eldest, had to run the house and look after us.”

“We depended on her, but she was free with her tongue and her hands. One tight slap she would give for nothing.”

“She would lash out if we didn’t listen. We used to run from her when she came. She was only our sister, but she acted very bossy.”

....

“She was so keen to study, *bap re*. First F.A., then B.A, then BT on top of that. Even after her marriage, she went for an MA...She studied more than any other girl in this family” (4-5).

These bits and pieces provide us the picture of a girl who aims high in life and seeks to empower herself through education. But, as Ida understands it this is only a part of the whole. And, the “whole” is to be dug out of the past. The past and the present lend meaning to the text as Ida tries to segregate myth from history to redefine her mother’s past. She achieves the historical insight vital to comprehend the times and the relevance of her mother’s struggle and the tough fight she gave to the conventional and reactionary forces. As Ida interrogates the past, she takes on herself the burden to re-right/re-write her mother’s story. In the process, the individual history of her mother and the history of the period is constructed and deconstructed as in *A Matter of Time*. In Deshpande’s novel Aru retrieves Kalayani’s past and discovers her strength in her foreboding silence; in Manju Kapur’s novel, Ida reclaims her mother and understands her mother’s dilemma and the implication of her compelling ‘desire’. Whereas socio-cultural imperatives become the determining factor for Virmati’s future life, her growing awareness of her individuality and identity become the controversial issue.

The defined norms for Virmati are—limited education and an early marriage. Probably, Virmati would have agreed to the arranged marriage with Inderjit, her fiancé, had she not met Professor Harish whose amorous advances and tickling romanticism awakened her sexuality. The juxtaposition of the dry, drab and matter-of-fact letter from Inderjit and the poetic

letters from the lovelorn Professor sufficiently highlight Virmati's confusion. During their first encounter, Virmati becomes aware of the Professor's "indulgent" smile, his interest in music and his infatuated expression. "The Professor put on his sweetest Bach and was rewarded by the look on Virmati's face. This girl has potential, he found himself thinking, while Virmati listened and dreamed more intensely than she ever had of her fiancé ..." (35). To be important to someone, to be indispensable, to be wanted is psychologically strength giving. And Virmati is never able to taste the delightfulness of this feeling. She is indispensable for her family but she is not made to feel that way. Instead, she is scolded if she is remiss in her duty towards her younger siblings and always exhorted to be an ideal; Inderjit's letter fails to give her the sensation of being important to him. The Professor succeeds in winning her affection by his demonstrative love. He writes letters in racy romantic language, and threatens that he would commit suicide were she to marry another man. Juvenile as this may sound, it has the desired impact on Virmati who undergoes intense psychological conflicts and dilemmas. With the thought of her marriage always at the back of her mind, countering the Professor's advances becomes a burden as if it split her "into two socially unacceptable pieces" (51). When her family does not agree to postpone her marriage she attempts suicide, an act that not only brings the family in social disfavor but also leads them to keep her under control. The overlapping of the private and the public selves brings in severe repercussions. The woman suffers for her passions and the dominant discourse clamps its laws on the outlawed self. It is sacrilegious for a woman to have 'desire'; it is a sin to be so passionate, and as a resistant measure, the society devises stricter norms to keep her under vigil and curb her freedom. In its turn, the situation intensifies Virmati's resolve to rebel against injustice. Herein lies much of the novel's appeal to the feminist discourse that decries the denial of selfhood and subjectivity to women and resists the existing social

order of patriarchy. If feminism, real feminism is "about freeing women to be genuine individuals," as Susan Faludi contends, then such restrictive measures surely ring the misogynistic note. (qtd. Lehrman, 1997:1)

But if Manju Kapur's novel supports the feminist agenda of demonstrating the extent to which the text subverts oppressive structures and traditions by articulating a suppressed femininity, it also problematizes the risk of a re/turn to the oppressive status quo. The text asks us to consider whether Virmati's decision to break all familial norms and follow the Professor and exist as a co-wife with dubious social status is not the worst possible thing that could happen to Virmati. To the extent Virmati's firm stand taken for her right to higher education, her aspirations to carve out a career, and her desire to be independent and self-supporting, guarantees a distinct identity for her. Even her resistance to the arranged marriage and her dogged persistence to continue her relations with the Professor can be analysed as crucial to the feminist discourse. Her resolve, "if I was to be a rubber doll for others to move as they willed, then I didn't want to live" (85) has the seed of militancy about it. But unfortunately, her obsessive need of the Professor and her inability to rise above "desires" and passions shoves her into unsavory situations: first, a mistress undesirable in the society; second, a wife detested by the Professor's family (Ganga and his mother); and then a mother defied by her daughter. Instead of being an autonomous person, Virmati turns out to be a drifter; she fails as a mother as well as a woman because she cannot provide a nurturing environment to her daughter nor can she be an expert housekeeper like her mother. Unfortunately, the young girl (Virmati) who plays the housekeeping and nurturing roles as a sister and a daughter is turned into a naught as a woman/wife/mother.

Shakuntala and Swarn Lata have not been portrayed elaborately in the novel but compared to Virmati they stand out as stronger and with clearer vision. Shakuntala, her first cousin too

has fought the family pressures and has succeeded in carving out a life for herself. Though she patterns her life on the Western model, she appears more stable and emotionally stronger to question the hegemonic structures. Swarn Lata has political concerns and she becomes a powerful figure in the nationalist movement. She furthers her goal implicitly and participates in the political activities like organizing women's meetings, taking out anti-colonial demonstrations and talking highbrow politics. Swarn Lata, a powerful public speaker of her time, an active member of the Women's Conference is discerning and much more unconventional than Virmati. Not that things are easy for her in the colonial atmosphere of her society and home. Even in her college, she faces opposition. She tells how her nomination to senior studentship is forestalled because, "They didn't want me. Too much khadi-wearing, too many speeches about our cause in the debating society" (122), she tells Virmati jovially. Further, she advises her logically, "Marriage is not the only thing in life," there are other important things for women to do. "The war—the satyagrah movement—because of these things, women are coming out of their homes. Taking jobs, fighting, going to jail. Wake up from your stale dream" (139). Virmati should take advantage of the time:

Most families look up on the marriage of a daughter as a sacred duty—or sacred burden. We are lucky we're living in times when women can do something else. Even in Europe women gain more respect during war time. And here we have that war, and our satyagraha as well (140).

Swarna's observation is meaningful and scholars confirm that during the times of war or revolution, the attention of the society is focused on woman's power rather than on her disability.

Swarna Lata's tips to Virmati are practical—get involved in the freedom struggle and keep the Professor away; and once she is free of his influence, she will relieve her family's tension. Theoretically, Swarna's idea appeals to Virmati but practically

she is too weak to take up the challenge of a life of uncertainty and aloneness. “Swarna’s words gave her some comfort. But that meant thinking of a life for herself without marriage, which was strange and not quite right. It meant she would be alone, and she wasn’t sure she was capable of it” (140). Later in life, Virmati’s intense anxiety about her, “husbandless, childless” daughter Ida refigures her original terror. Her lament, “what will happen to you after I am gone” (258) is the painful consequence of her frail subjectivity. In fact, Virmati could hardly get over the dispiriting sense of emotional pain, disorder and the fragile sense of self.

Since the publication of *Difficult Daughters* critics have valorized Virmati for standing against patriarchy and asserting her individuality. True, Virmati is different. She fights her family, protests imposition on her will, carves her way to higher education, but she remains as much in the clutches of the hegemonic order as any other woman, only with the difference that while women in general accept the patriarchal structure mutely, Virmati shows the courage to question it. Not only does she resist her parental family, she questions the Professor, withdraws herself from him, goes to Sirmour State to work in Pratibha Kumari Vidyalaya. After her removal from the prestigious job because of the Professor’s clandestine visits, she decides to leave for Shantiniketan so that she could restore her self-identity, and recover her independence. She hopes that being away from the Professor will help her to regain her will power and strength. When the Professor stops her from going, she almost forces him to legitimize their relationship. The text paints her as “restless and dissatisfied” after her BT and “hungry to work, and anxious to broaden her horizons” (167) but what the rhetoric depicts is overruled by the mimesis. On the one hand Virmati’s own contradictory claims and visions of education, work, passionate love and marriage create instability in her, on the other, the Professor’s opportunism weakens her. He never lets her be. In valorizing his love in no uncertain terms the novelist fails to see

that his is a love that is binding, suffocating and demanding. It does not give her freedom to 'be'. In short, it is lust that the novel misconstrues for love.

Arjun, what did you see when you hit the eye of the bird with the arrow, that all your brothers missed?

Guruji, I saw nothing just the black dot in the centre.

So Harish saw nothing but Virmati,

A flying arrow aimed at a still bird. (171)

The focus of critics and the author is almost always on Virmati and her fight; and the role played by Professor Harish in devastating her life does not assume significance. Or it could be because of the narrative strategy. In reconstructing her mother, Ida traces Virmati's life so vehemently that the men—Virmati's father, uncles and others and even the Professor slide into insignificance. Since Ida's gaze is on her mother, the text de-emphasizes the centrality of the Professor's role. The story frames the issue of woman-centered resistance to patriarchy and colonialism and in the process the novel indicates that it will be the story of the recovery of female power and voice. Instead, what happens is Virmati succumbs to the pressures not only from the dominant discourse but also from her internalized value system. She accepts the conventional marriage and the text reverses the paradigms of revolt it started with. The Professor is the representative of the patriarchal power structure that has always obscured woman's needs. He is possessive and steeped in sexual conservatism. He unabashedly expresses his love, threatens suicide were she to abandon him, wants her to disregard her family and break her engagement. On the question of marrying her, however, he talks of "My wife, my son..." (185). He awakens to his duty towards his family, "What can I do?" he asks his poet friend helplessly, "I am hemmed in and tortured on all sides. I know I have been unfair to her—I know ... Everybody will condemn me, her. My children will never accept it, nor my mother" (185). Although

socially he has valid reasons to desist from a second marriage, he has had no right to blackmail Virmati. One can give him credit, as Swarn Lata does, for not abandoning his wife, but he makes everybody around him unhappy and insecure by persisting in his relationship with Virmati. He evades the topic when Virmati wants him to marry her. “What does he say?” Swarn Lata asks, to which Virmati’s frank reply is: “That’s it. He doesn’t say anything, only looks hurt when I bring up the topic. As though I don’t trust him” (139). He agrees to marry her after she finally takes a hard stand. The Professor’s male ego inflates, “Imagine going to Shantiniketan! What will she learn compared to what I can teach her?” (186). After their marriage, Virmati settles down to routine and is silenced, succumbing to the male authority of her husband. The once fiery and resistant Virmati becomes a submissive wife. Ida does not dwell at length on her parent’s life together but a few deft touches here and there are enough to show her mother’s muted acceptance of authority. One of the incidents she records is about the choice of name ‘Ida’ for her. It is the Professor’s male prerogative to impose his will in naming his child:

“Bharati,” suggested Virmati as a name.

“No,” said Harish.

“No? But why? I thought with the birth of our country ...”

“I don’t wish our daughter to be tainted with the birth of our country. What birth is this”? ...

Harish’s voice rose hysterically, and the girl was named Ida. (255-6)

With that the topic ends and Virmati is silenced into accepting it after a weak question. After all her revolt and the accompanying tension and bitterness, what has Virmati achieved? Certainly not a “New Woman” status, nor the essentialist, nationalist position of a revered ‘Indian womanhood’! Despite her rebellion, she remains a rubber doll doing what the Professor approves; appreciating what he thought is admirable in art, literature and

life. He acquires a condescending attitude when he explains art to her, “But the test of great art is in its ability to express the inner realities of life, those realities of life, those realities that don’t change according to time and place, that have a universal application”(120). Virmati looks “simple” listening to him in rapt attention, but Ida in rejecting the word ‘simple’ contends, “Nobody has any business to live in the world and know nothing about its ways”(207). Virmati is not simple; she is unable to coordinate between feminine subjectivity and the traditional patriarchal paradigms. Through Ida’s admiration of Swarn Lata’s strength and individuality, the author perceives the new woman as “aware, self-controlled, strong-willed, self-reliant, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood” (Malik 2001:137). To read the novel only on the basis of Virmati’s fight and proclaim it as a female-centered representation of a woman, who refuses to be over-awed by the dominant ideology, is to give it a limited reading.

In writing the story of her mother as Ida selects and arranges material from the oral and written records, the thin line between fact and fiction remains undistinguishable. The deliberate intermingling of genre draws attention to the novel as a postmodern discourse in which the author/narrator highlights some fact as per her choice and gives us a truth that stands to interrogation. In an interview with Anne Burke, Rudie Wiebe the Canadian author observes that since history is arranged in a consequential plot, it becomes an emplotted narrative and as such all the facts it presents may not necessarily be true:

History is often just the accidental data you happen to have. What is really crucial or important in what happened may have existed only in certain acts that were never recorded. No one ever saw. So there is always an assumption amongst historians that the most important things that happened are the ones you can find evidence for. That may not be true. (Wiebe 1985: 27).

Through reconstruction and deconstruction of personal and anti-colonial histories, the author interrogates the true nature of resistance. Who are, indeed, the difficult daughters of the title—Ida, who rejects everything including her mother? Virmati, who defies the family? Shankuntala, who resists Gandhi’s essentialist modern Indian woman? Or Swarn Lata, who resists the empire? At which level does resistance work? It could also be resistance to Partition and the “needless violence” (256). It is not, however, comfortable to answer such questions when “the deed was done.” The only choice for Ida, Virmati and the Professor, as well as country is to just go on living.

IV

Shobha De’s *Socialite Evenings* takes a big leap forward in depicting the so-called “new” Indian woman—free, frank, fearless and uninhibited, quick to deal with men on tit for tat basis, venturing into the territory of radical feminism and risking collision with the idealized image of Indian womanhood. The characters, both male and female, digress into degenerative practices and the novel, overtly militant, hits back not only at patriarchy but conversely at the very basis of resistance, and collapses despite its empowering move. The preceding discussion of *A Matter of Time* and *Difficult Daughters* reveals some of the resistant strategies women follow as a counter-response to restrictive and oppressive hegemonic order, showing how resistance requires a kind of self-discipline to counter tradition. Kalyani’s stoic silence and Sumi’s refusal to react are far more successful resistant practices than Virmati’s self-assertion that creates an illusion of liberation without being emancipatory in the real sense. Writers like Shobha De, Namita Gokhle, Uma Vasudev and also a number of Hindi and regional language women writers, in their anxiety to locate woman’s anger at the

system emphasize on constructing women who tend to fall out of the exiting structure by rejecting all that is value-based in favour of “libidinous extravaganza”, which Jaidev terms “the strategy of trivializing and fetishizing ‘feminism’ and the strategy of making feminism too involved, jargonistic, abstractified...” (Jaidev 1992:58). Feminism is concerned with power; it is revolutionary in that it advocates change, but when an ideology becomes a trend and is followed because it is prestigious to follow it, it results in exhibitionism and ceases to be relevant to the indigenous system that it wishes to change.

One may appreciate the fighting spirit of women like Karuna and Anjali (*Socialite Evenings*) who stand up for their individualism by rejecting commodification and aim at achieving optimum personal happiness but without any alternative, replacement model, their brand of feminism becomes a mindless imitation of the Western model—outdated, chauvinistic and irrelevant. In transcending her middle-class value-system for the glamour of a class she does not identify with, Shobha De’s Karuna neutralizes her emancipatory zeal and lands into a situation that is far more alienating and oppressive than the cultural determinism she runs away from. Her imitation can be termed in the post-modernist parley the “culture of pastiche” (Connor 2000:124), which in itself is a culture of “vacuity” devoid of purpose and moral grounds.⁸

When Shobha De’s *Socialite Evenings* appeared in 1988, it took the literary world by a storm. Readers and reviewers, scholars and critics were awe-struck by the frank portrayal of woman’s sexuality by a woman. The shock waves were almost like the ones generated by Thomas Hardy’s *Tess*, Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* and D.H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Hardy annoyed his Victorian contemporaries not only for having made a “girl like Tess the heroine of a novel,” but also for having added insult to the injury by “calling her a ‘pure woman’.” As regards Kate Chopin’s novel, critics “disapproved of the sexual frank-

ness,” and were especially disturbed by the narrator’s neutrality towards the unconventional behaviour of Edna.⁹ But that was a hundred years back when Victorian morals governed the social sensibilities, far removed in time and space from the India of today. Towards *Socialite Evenings*, too, critics were not favourably inclined; rather most of them were hostile. They attacked the book as blatant and banal, “choked with listless lust,” full of high society “potpourri,” and sickening perversions.¹⁰ But once the initial shocked reactions were over, scholars found Karuna intriguing and the novel worth a second thought. Some critics hailed it for its feminist overtones indicating the arrival of a “new” Indian woman eager to defy the orthodox patriarchal social system while some others appreciated it as well as De’s other works for “discovering India through Indian eyes” (Davidar 1991:43). R.S. Pathak, surveying Shobha De’s oeuvre held the view that De “lashes out at hypocrisy with all her might” and that she has no claim to “idealistic purpose” or the desire to create an “aesthetic effect” (Pathak 1995:102-03). *Socialite Evenings* is Karuna’s story, of her struggle up the social ladder, which is an impressive success story, but as for calling her the new woman, critics have their reservations.

According to many Karuna and her tribe can at best be termed “aberrations.” Thus, we have three contrasting views: those who put the novel in the category of “soft porn;” those who foresee the arrival of the ‘new woman’ in the female assertion; and those who find the “aberrant” behaviour of De’s female characters as a temporary sally from the mainstream. These different perspectives are pointers to the fact that despite its seemingly uncomplicated, simple structure, the novel calls for deeper study precisely because it is a difficult feminist novel in that in the process of questioning and subverting the patriarchal structure, it gets re-incorporated into its folds and creates a neo-authoritarian structure obliterating female identity not only by asserting gender politics of the reverse order but also by the use of language

of the dominant discourse. To an extent, only Karuna is able to stand on her own by insisting on re-creating her life.

On the surface, Karuna is an ordinary middle-class girl who learns how to climb up the ladder of success, transcend the class barrier and acquire what she desires most—a wealthy, high society life and no responsibility. She is surrounded by socialites—Anjali, Ritu, Si and a whole lot of females who have outrageously shallow attitude to life and its problems, their only approach to life is inordinate hunger for sex and greed for wealth. In this cluster of promiscuous society-women we have to find the real Karuna, not the one with superficial aspirations but the one with inner strength.

The difficulty in understanding Karuna arises, I believe, because of the narrative pattern of the novel. Except for a short prologue and a shorter epilogue in third person narration, the entire novel, comprising almost three hundred pages, is in first person. It is through the eyes of Karuna that the author shows us her world—a world in which middle-class morality is juxtaposed with higher-class promiscuity. While Anjali and others have severed all links with their middle-class families, Karuna remains the denizen of these two classes. The ‘I’ of the narrative is pulled in two opposite directions. Consciously, she wants to belong to the highbrow society but unconscious forces still work underneath and deter her. Breaking the internalized moral code is not as easy for her as it has been for Anjali. The result is that although the author wants to present her heroine as a woman striving to achieve liberation in the real sense, Karuna oft and on regresses into the realm of puny passions, bawdy languages and heady materialism. Only towards the end of the novel the ‘I’ of the narrative understands her self-worth and decides to be her ‘self’. ‘I know when I’m on to a good thing and the good thing is me,’ (306) she tells her American friend as she decides to write her life. Writing provides her time for retrospection and serves to release her ‘self’. The motion of the narrative is

circular but the ‘prologue’ and the ‘epilogue’ ascertains its linear movement.

That Shobha De wants us to see her heroine as a liberated woman there is no doubt. First, Karuna rebels against the authority of her father, disregards her mother’s warning and has her own way. Then, after her marriage when life becomes suffocating she breaks free from the shackles of a meaningless marriage. As a single woman she does not allow men to take liberties with her; she puts them in their places with flippant disregard. She gets in touch with her feelings she has suppressed so far and has a sense of ‘becoming’. The rhetoric of the novel celebrates Karuna’s feminist rebellion. It also authenticates De’s assertion that she feels strongly about the women’s situation. “I write with a great deal of empathy towards women,” she once said. “Without waving the feminist flag, I feel empathy strongly about the women’s situation” (De, 1995:3) but, as Karuna proceeds with her soul bearing, she reveals much of herself that is not feminist stuff. And while Shobha De allows Karuna to recount her story, we find her surrounded with women whose only claim to feminist liberation is their sexual perversion.

The question that arises is: what constitutes the “new” Indian woman in the contemporary discourse. Feminist critics like Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Ipshita Chanda, Tejaswini Niranjana and others define woman as “new” in the sense of being of the times she is living in and also in the sense of being modern and liberated. Further, as the “Indian” woman, she possesses “a pan-Indian identity that escapes regional, communal, or linguistic specificities, but she does not thereby become westernized” (Sunder Rajan 1993:130). For Ipshita Chanda new/liberated /modern are “metonyms,” and using one of them means referring all the others (qtd. In Sunder Rajan 1993:130). While discussing the representation of the “new” woman in television serials, Sunder Rajan notes how the portrayal of the young “rebel” through her rebellious sexuality subtly deconstructs the feminist discourse to

make her acceptable to the society through encoded femininity. On the country, we find that the sexual forays and misplaced self-assertion of Anjali, Karuna and all their friends deconstruct the feminist discourse in the reverse in that these women do not implicitly project the feminist agenda of self-development through taking responsibility for the self and for empowerment; instead of aiming at realizing their female “self” through the individual freedom, they reiterate the limited and intellectually shallow attitude to life.

Resistance has an aim; it offers a liberating space for the resister. Only hitting back and breaking purposelessly can neither be a resisting strategy nor a liberating force. Girish’s observations are quite revealing when he tells Karuna, “you are much too talented to waste your time” in superficialities (255) and trivialities of life. This is a fact of Karuna’s life till she decides to represent herself through her writing. The moment she says, “There is a book in there somewhere ... and it’s mine” she assumes centrality. Her reworking of her personal history affords her an intention and a continuity, which in the postmodern discourse constitutes a subject-making activity. She is the subject who can confer meaning to everything she sees or interacts with. Her book starts in first person on a note of authority: “I was born in a dusty clinic in Satara, a remote village in Maharashtra”, and ends on a note of authority (9). But since these words appear “unexciting” to her, she decides to shift her focus:

Bombay—it is Bombay which has shaped me into what I am now and it’s the story of Bombay I want to tell. And when I think about Bombay the person who comes to mind is Anjali and so I shall begin my narrative with her (9).

So, it becomes the story of Anjali; via Anjali of Karuna, her socialite friends and her middle-class family. It is initially the story of Karuna’s resistance to her middle-class origin, her break with its constricting norms and finally of her return to its folds.

Her words to Girish have the significance of a prodigal daughter’s return: “I’m discovering stuff about myself. I enjoyed this little patch of independence. I’m reconnecting with my parents—they need me. I’m enjoying their presence... it’s lovely feeling to have them at home when I get back” (255-6).

For women like Anjali, Ritu, Si and Winnie nothing is sacred—neither marriage, nor home, nor children. Anjali is the rebellious one. She has discarded her middle-class family and has stepped into the hi-fi society with the conscious purpose of enjoying the liberated life of a wealthy man’s wife. Any man is good enough for her if he has money. She marries but leads a miserable existence with the alcoholic, womanizer Abe. After this, we find her changing her husbands/lovers in rapid succession till she settles down for ‘K’ or Kumar, a fabulously rich homosexual. Then, Anjali becomes a devotee of Krishna and waxes eloquent over her new found religious passion:

What is sex compared to religion? Nothing! The ecstasy I experience when I’m praying or listening to my *bhajans* is far better than an orgasm. I’m into this totally, and sex has become irrelevant, in fact, I hate to use the sort of language we used to... I feel impure. I go and gargle immediately if these words come out by mistake. If I’m not near my bathroom... I quickly take out my mint breath-freshner pump and do a fast whoosh whoosh. (140)

Shallow as this statement sounds, her friend Si considers her distracted and suggests “treatment”, rather than a temple. Treatment here obviously means sex. Very soon, the same “converted” Anjali gets obsessed with her “looks” and makes a pathetic fool of herself.

Anjali is not an emancipated woman by any standard. Just imitating men and acting out like them in matters of sexual liberation, does not make a woman a feminist. There is no “female awareness” in her. Anjali and her likes do not express their identity. The author also does not explore these women

psychologically. They are neither projected as ethereally beautiful, kind, generous, sensitive and lively women as authors of yore did, nor are they the free and self-actualized beings able to establish their own individuality. These women are not lucky enough to experience the inherent omnipotence of love; they are not strong enough to stand on their own and meet the challenges of life. Their world is, in fact, as male-oriented as the middle-class world they have rejected. Their husbands are the providers who treat their wives shabbily. Their men exercise control over them and reduce them to mere puppets or show pieces. What have Anjali and her friends gained then?

Let us take the case of Ritu. For all her glamour and social position, she is an ill-treated wife. In private, her husband beats her sadistically and she submits to it daily; in public, he “reveled in her glamour and sex-appeal” (108), and allows her to flirt openly with his friends and acquaintances. She “attracted all sorts, from little servant boys she mothered to silver-haired industrialists who drooled at her feet and begged for a smile” (107). They were ready, as Ritu boasts, “to drink champagne out of my slippers”(107). At one of the parties Karuna is amused to see an old man weeping, falling at Ritu’s feet and crying, “trample me, walk all over me—but let’s spend just one night together” (107). Such incidents satisfy Ritu’s vanity but do not fill in the void. Like Anjali, Ritu also changes husbands/lovers. It is Gul first who tortures her physically and psychologically till she attempts at suicide, then there is a hefty Sikh and then back to Gul. Ritu cannot live without a man because the male means security, comfort and luxury. As Anjali points out, “it is easy to get accustomed to the good things in life. Luxury is like a narcotic—you can’t get enough of it...” (242). Anjali, Ritu, Si and others have hardly any chance for happiness because life cannot be full of happiness without a phenomenal naturalness, and inner strength. These women, on the contrary, are running from one relationship to the other in search of superficiality.

Such portrayals do not do justice to the feminist discourse. In simplest terms, feminism can be discussed as the process of becoming, a process of self-presentation, "registering a relation both to body and to the social meaning of womanhood" (Delmer 1994: 5). In the past, feminism focused on male sexuality and the imposition of male desire on women. The need was to liberate women from the male domination/female oppression syndrome. Earlier, there was also a curiosity about female sexuality. But with postmodernism, the emphasis shifted to women as subject with focus on women's experience, history, psyche and literature. *Socialite Evenings* concerns itself with the question of pornography without fighting for any cause, without even subverting the elitist, highbrow society. The novel instead of being a serious feminist literary text leaves the fictional canvas full of incoherence and irresolvable propositions.

Karuna is spirited and rebellious though. As a teenager, she fantasied of marrying a man like Roark, the hero of *The Fountainhead*. She was forever getting ideas of rebellion from pulp literature, and enjoying obscene photographs in nude magazines (16-17). Secretly she even longed to be a nightclub crooner (18). She deliberately irritated her father, challenged all his rules and regulations and rebelled: whistling, smoking and cultivating friendship with boys, in short, walking into the forbidden territory. To an extent, even the mature Karuna, looking back on her girlhood enjoys her father's discomfort, not mischievously but with a kind of amused preoccupation, "Father, expectedly, expressed his disapproval at this but I'm sure he was puzzled by it all. Poor man couldn't figure out how or why the youngest of his three daughters was giving him, and by extension the family, such a tough time" (17). By way of contrast, Karuna's two elder sisters are all that the middle-class girls ought to be—passive, obedient, and submissive. Karuna cannot wait for an arranged marriage, to be "chosen" by a man. "I don't want to marry a decent man. He'll probably bore me to death" (33); she proclaims

and marries a “rich bum” (62) as her ad-film-man well-wisher calls him. Soon, Karuna realizes that money could not make her happy. With the weak “Sonny boy” playing into the hands of his possessive mother, Karuna’s marriage turns sour. She tries to find out what and where things went wrong. “What was wrong with my marriage? What had gone wrong? . . . my marriage went sour because I’d married the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time. My husband was not a villain. He was just an average Indian husband—unexciting, uninspiring, untutored?” (65); and she, an “exhausted generation of wives with no dreams left” (65). Karuna shows utter disregard for male superiority. She makes fun of her husband, “He reminded me of a loyal cocker spaniel when we first met, and as we grew older, the canine resemblance became startling” (65). This indeed, is far removed from the tradition of deferential treatment women have given to their husbands, the proverbial “Pati-dev” (husband-god). With such straight-faced and transparently non-serious statements, Karuna resists patriarchy and assumes power. Simultaneously, by deconstructing the theory that humor is male-identified and women have no sense of humor, Shobha De makes her men the butt of laughter/ridicule and erodes textual/sexual politics.

Taking up the case for Karuna, we find that for all her imperfections and flirtations, she is a far more steady character and can well stand out as an emancipated woman toward the end of the novel. Initially, she starts her journey toward liberation by openly rebelling against the formidable patriarch—her father. The three daughters and their mother were mortally afraid of his authority. The mother, in particular, was wary, as father always blamed her for whatever happened, even for the children’s mistakes (13). This middle-class family scene is familiar, though. It is Karuna who defies her father’s authority and becomes a problem child. “I was the only child with a discipline problem both at home and at school” (14-15). She describes herself as a “sassy kid, small for her age, oppressed at home and hungering for things she didn’t

have” (15). Soon she transcends her middle-class boundaries, gets to know Anjali, and is initiated into the modeling world and later into the world of the rich. Such flights are well-used plot devices in feminist fiction; these are flights not only from masculine values but also toward feminist utopia, which however is all too often a dystopia. Elaine Showalter in her discussion of feminist novels between 1880 to 1910 notes that “feminist utopias were not visions of primary womanhood, free to define its own nature and culture, but flights from the male tradition” (Showalter 1977:4). These escapes continue well into the present century. Commensurate with the culture, Indian women writers depict withdrawal or retreat that gives the protagonists a chance to look within and come to terms with their inner core of being.

Karuna’s flight of fancy soon comes to an end. When the initial romance cools down she finds life with her husband stifling. He is his mother’s “baba” and Karuna is relegated to oblivion. She records her life with him thus:

I’d be sitting pensively in a chair when my husband would say ‘Oh no! You aren’t thinking again.’ It was worse when I tried to share any of my thoughts with him. ‘Not now, I’m reading’. Or ‘Not now, I’m watching T.V.’ or ‘Not now, I’ve got important business problems’. Then when? I’d seethe. Soon it became never. I just stopped wanting to share anything with him. Initially, I felt stifled by this lack of communication. I used to experience a sensation not unlike physical suffocation. I’d start to choke and turn pale. (87-88)

This is reminiscent of Anita Desai’s females who resent their husbands’ preoccupation with themselves at the cost of their wives’ psychological demands. Interestingly, however, while Anita Desai’s women characters do not deviate from the accepted moral norms, Shobha De’s Karuna flings all matters of propriety and impropriety aside and embarks upon an individual effort to overcome her dependence on the male and tries to escape from the endless captivity.

All through the narrative Karuna seems to be torn by a conflict. Was she really happy in a society she was not accustomed to? She does not ask this question overtly but at the out-set of her story she reflects if the life-pattern and value-system of her middle-class home was not far better than the ones she was following.... "I wonder if I wouldn't have been happier if I had lived the way Mother did" (12). To draw an analogy here, we find that even Shashi Deshpande's Saru (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*) feels happier to emulate her mother's life-style after fifteen years of highbrow life of a metropolitan doctor. To this we shall return in the next chapter.

Though Karuna hates to go back, after her divorce, to her middle-class struggle with living, she knows that she will get security only in its fold. There is conflict again as she broods over with distaste at her middle-class background. But she cannot shake-off her middle-class values she has internalized despite herself. In the society of her rich friends, she feels unnatural. Envying Ritu her spontaneity she says:

She (Ritu) was spontaneous, I was inflexible. She was shallow, vibrant, buoyant and fun. I was anxiety-ridden and tense when I was not anxiety-ridden and bored (109).

Karuna, too, like Anjali and her other friends has a long line of boy friends, lovers and admirers. It starts with Bunty whom she jilts after her return from the U.S.A.; later it is Krish, Girish, Varun and a whole lot of them. With some of them she just flirts (which leads a critic to condemn her freedom as "unlimited freedom to flirt"), with some she is flippant and dismissive while with others she is curt. Even Girish, who appears to be a prospective groom, is relegated to his proper place when he tries to come closer. Karuna handles men with disregard. Though she is friendly with them, she does not allow them to swap her identity. Man as such is not the enemy as with the female chauvinists, nor is he the master to be followed unquestioningly as it was/is with

the conventional thinking. Her approach bewilders her mother for whom her daughter's return to the family folds is indicative of her acceptance of the family-values. It would be naïve, however, to believe that Karuna nestles safely within the legitimacy of her middle-class value-system and abides by the cultural norms. She gets emotional security with her family but she still flaunts the image of a sexually liberated woman. What goes to her credit is that though she is free and frank in her dealings with men, she does not allow her male friends to take liberties with her or to take her for granted. She keeps them at a distance not because of the fear of any supervising hegemonic power but because she herself does not want any intimacy beyond a certain limit. To one of her male friend's conjecture that she is a "free bird," her irritated reaction is that even free birds have a "choice," implying thereby that he was not her choice. The assertion of "choice" is an indication of both self-confidence and contention of control. This is not to condone Shobha De's licentious portrayal of sexuality but to ascertain how by challenging the socio-cultural mores, she problematizes resistance.

Writing her life has been a strenuous exercise through which Karuna emerges successful though exhausted. It has been a therapy. Many artists, including writers, confirm that art provides therapeutic relief. To quote some real life examples, Kate Chopin started writing as a means to get release from her disturbing personal conditions, for Virginia Woolf writing worked as a therapy after the bout of insanity, so was it with Sylvia Plath; among fictional characters we have many of Margaret Atwood's protagonists or nearer home Shashi Deshpande's characters who are relieved of their tensions after creative activity. Between her divorce and her success as a T.V. filmmaking, Karuna passes through a traumatic period. Writing gives her the desired 'space'. In the beginning of the novel, she tells Bunty, her boy friend, that she needed her own "space." "I feel claustrophobic. I need to find myself" (55). What she but vaguely understood at that time,

years ago, becomes a reality on that day when she announces to her American friend that she is taking the control in her hands and writing her book.

Karuna's claim that she is the "good thing" has come under criticism. She is viewed by some as selfishly governed by the 'I' and 'Me' elements and as lacking in sensibility. The 'I' and 'Me' elements, I feel are not synonymous with selfishness but are assertion of the self. She sees herself as an individual and for this she needed "an inner space" and an expression. Her occupational participation makes her understanding and helps her acquire a new personality even in her relation to men and her immediate family. She for the first time in her life feels sorry for her parents and understands their agony. As an independent woman she decides to do away with male support. "I wasn't Anjali," (304), she says and we agree with her. After all, Karuna is not as promiscuous as her female friends. Her middle-class morality stays with her to an extent. This is obvious from her reaction after her stormy affair with Krish. She considers herself an "adulteress" and regrets that she had joined the ranks of all those women whom she had condemned in the past. Yet she is so put off by her insensitive, uncommunicative husband that she pursues the affair. After every phone call or meeting with Krish, Karuna's thoughts go to her parents and she visualizes their reactions. She is never really free from her conditioning.

Shobha De's Karuna gets in touch with herself by the end of the novel and strives to develop her human potentialities. She stands on her own. She rejects her husband's renewed offer to return to him because she knows that life would be stifling once again. In accepting responsibility for herself, she displays courage. Forestalling male efforts to dominate and exploit her vulnerability as a single woman she feels elevated in her own esteem. Karuna is De's 'new' woman to an extent. She is not self-effacing like her middle class counterparts, nor is she a sex-doll like her elite-class friends. She values her freedom and her individuality.

The novel contains a subtle advocacy for exploring woman's inner consciousness and making her aware of her unconscious potential. Karuna goes back to her parents and is welcomed by them. She learns to empathize with her demented sister. She finds release from tension, not in running away but in being part of the family. Writing her autobiography lends her further understanding of her inner aspirations and leads to self-conscious assertion of the self. As she gets in touch with her inner self, she discovers her own space. The novel has a circular motion and it ends where it began. Writing becomes a therapy and we meet Karuna as an able woman who is preparing herself for a career.

V

The three novels discussed here offer resistance to patriarchy through different modes. If Shobha De chooses to be overtly feminist on the Western model, Manju Kapur shows the period of slow female awakening, and Shashi Deshpande highlights the subtle nuances of the resistance consciousness. One would agree that the hegemonic stronghold would not disappear with such protests, but their very presence in life and literature and the capacity of the protagonists/authors to ignore or challenge or elude the intrusive edicts of the dominant discourse show the shift in focus and the will to question. The authors offer a critique of the existing social reality and recognize the potential of the struggle to confront both inside and outside fields of power. The resisters first resurrect themselves as self-determining subjects by evolving an autonomous consciousness and also demystify the allied forces of patriarchy. One of the instruments of power is the mother, the matriarch who is the visible signifier for patriarchal control; it is through the mediation of woman that patriarchy represses woman. The matriarch becomes not the symbol of benign feminine power but a highly charged symbol of the manipulating power of the hegemony that the

authors/their characters choose to defy. The point of discussion in the next chapter will be to identify how important it is for the male-dominated system to turn the discourse on woman and ensure the continuance of the cultural conceptions through appropriating the discursive contours of an indigenous pattern. To a great extent, the resistance given to the matriarch diffuses the tensions and opens up new avenues for change for the protagonists and helps them cultivate a relationship based on self-understanding.

Notes

1. In Henrik Ibsen's *A Dolls House*, (Ibsen: *The Complete Major Prose Plays*. Trans. Rolf Fjelds. New Farrar Straus Giroux, 1965. 119-196), his heroine Nora Helmer rebels against her doll-like role in life, and to assert her claims to full individuality, leaves her home. Though Nora has stood as a symbol of women's resistance since the publication of the play and has been appreciated for her courage to break away from patriarchal power structure, feminists of late are questioning her anonymity. Edna Pontellier (Kate Chopin. *The Awakening*. New York: The Modern Library, 1981) finds no solution to her existential problem. She dreads female choicelessness and her own impulses; after her final awakening she recognizes life's realities for a woman, makes her own choice and walks into the sea. Probably, death is an easy solution to her conflict (For further discussion of her psychological imperatives, see also Usha Bande "From Conflict to Suicide-A Feminist Approach to Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*." *Kate Chopin's The Awakening*, ed. Iqbal Kaur. Delhi: Deep & Deep, 1995, 157-69). Similarly, D.H. Lawrence's unnamed heroine of "The Woman Who Rode Away" (D.H. Lawrence. *Stories, Essays and Poems*. London: J.M. Dent, 1973), rides away into an Indian settlement, never to be heard of. Feminist criticism has seen positive feminist signs of rebellion in these women's refusal to accept the stereotype roles, but recent criticism doubts the exigency of anonymity or death as solution for the heroines' problems as it focuses on autonomy reached through the exercise of agency.

2. The contemporary women writers do not place mother, the matriarch, on the pedestal. They tend to see her as fallible and hence as human. Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* has three mother figures—Nirode, Monisha, Amla's biological mother; Calcutta, the city as Mother; and Mother Kali, the archetypal Mother. The latter two are legendary and mythical figures and are awe-inspiring, whereas the real mother of the children is not the revered character. Recently, motherhood is also debunked. Though Indian women do not deny it and look forward to it as fulfilling, in some of the contemporary novels women find children as burden. Change in attitude is perceptible even in men novelists' portrayal of the mother, as in Manohar Malgonkar's *The Princes* where the Maharani succumbs to the demands of the body. Critics see the trend in both men and women writers as consumerism-oriented with the Western market in view. Resistance to the mother offered by the younger generation has been discussed in the next chapter.
3. In “The Inner Rooms” (*The Intrusion and Other Stories*, Penguin, 1993). Shashi Deshpande subverts the Mahabharata story of Amba, Ambalika and Ambika, the three princesses of Kashi whom Bhishma abducts. When Amba resists the injustice and tries to take her own decision to return home and marry Salva, she realizes to her horror that she has no place whatsoever in the society. Salva refuses to accept her on the plea that as a defeated king he has forfeited his right to claim her; Bhishma cannot marry her, as it would not be “honourable” for him being under the vow of celibacy, and Vichitravirya considers it below his “honour” to marry a woman who professes love for another man (Salva). Amba is trapped between the “honourable” men only to find herself rejected, lonely and angry. For further discussion see Atma Ram and Usha Bande, “Many Faces of Tolerance—A View from Four Short Stories” *Psychic Knot: Search for Tolerance in Indian English Fiction*, ed. R.K. Singh (New Delhi: Bahri Publication, 1998: 99-107).
4. Vijaya Guttal, “Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* and *A Matter of Time*: A Reading in the Postcolonial Context.” *Littcrit.9*: 55 (June 2003) 54-63. For a postcolonial examination of Deshpande's novels see Mrinalini Sebastian, *The Novels of Shashi Deshpande in Postcolonial Arguments* (New Delhi: Prestige, 2000).

5. In many of her interviews and articles Shashi Deshpande resents the tendency to slot women as “women writers” and dub them as “feminists.” This, she feels tantamount to keeping them away from mainstream literature by “ghettoization”. See Sue Dickman, “An Interview with Shashi Deshpande.” *Post Independence Voices in South Asian Writings*. Ed. Malashi Lal et al. 125-36; and Geetha Gangadharan, “Denying the Otherness” (Interview). *The Fiction Of Shashi Deshpande*, ed. R.S.Pathak. 251-55.
6. The women-centered psychologists see the concept of sisterhood as a kind of protection women seek in each other; it does not necessarily have romantic or lesbian connotation. Within patriarchy women form their own community to counter the hegemonic order, they have empathic ties with each other and a supportive relationship which not only gives them moral and psychological strength but also guards them against male aggression, particularly if the woman is young, beautiful and without familial support. A fine example can be found in Mrinal Pande’s *Daughter’s Daughter* in which Hiruli di gets support from the narrator-protagonist’s grandmother. Similarly in the Indian cultural context where segregation of gender is practised, and at the time when women were not allowed out, the woman-woman dyad ensured entertainment for them. In the Western literature Susan Gaspell’s “The Trifles” (a play) beautifully and authentically illustrates the significance of empathy and sisterhood. For further discussion see Judith Jordan, “The Meaning of Mutuality.” *Women’s Growth in Connection: Writings from the Stone Center* (USA: The Guilford Press, 1991); Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1982); Elizabeth Abel, “[E] merging Identities: The Dynamics of Female Friendship in Contemporary Fiction by Women.” *Signs*. 6.3(1981): 413-35.
7. Kannabiran and Vasantha record how women are affected during war or revolutionary struggles when the patriarchal control is loosened: Suddenly, the four walls of the household seemed to fall apart and structures of feudal oppression, so unchanging and permanent in the past, were not only being questioned but were also challenged in practice. A new society, a socialist society was on the horizon. Women were being exhorted and required to come out and share the responsibility.... Paradoxically enough, although women are perceived as the guardians and preservers of traditional culture and

although the very stability of any given society is perceived as resting on the purity and orthodoxy of its women, in practice women have achieved major gains during periods of war or revolution.

Kannabiran & Vasantha, “That Magic Time: Women in the Telangana People’s Struggle,” Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid, ed. *Recasting Women*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989: 183).

8. Pastiche is the English version of the French term *Pasticcio* meaning “a medley of various ingredients, a hotchpotch” (OED). In literature, the use of pastiche was initially confined to style but in art and music it was popularly used to denote a potpourri made of various fragments to give quick effect to an artistic piece and suggested a trick or artifice. With modernism, pastiche acquired prestige but in the postmodern context many critics reject it. Fredric Jameson, for example observes, “Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulses, devoid of laughter and of any conviction.... Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs....” See Fredric James “Excerpts from Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.” Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, eds. *A Postmodern Reader*: 312-32.
9. See Nina Baym, “Introduction” to *The Awakening and Selected Short Stories* (New York: The Modern Library, 1981: vii); and also Thomas Hardy, “Preface to The Fifth and Later Editions”. *Tess of the D’urbervilles: A Pure Woman* (London: Macmillan, 1957: vii-xii).
10. Reactions of the critics can be found in the papers by Subhash Chandra: 228-314 and 242-51; Bhargavi P.Rao: 235-241 in R.K.Dhawan ed. *Indian Women Novelists Vol 1* (New Delhi: Prestige, 1991); and Khan’s views in *Changing Faces of Women in India Writing in English*, eds. M.Q. Khan and A.G.Khan (New Delhi: Creative Books, 1990). Also, Madhu Jain, “Cat on a Cold Tin Roof”: *India Today*, 15 October 1989: 195; and Sunil Sethi, “De in, De Out,” *Seminar* 384, August 1991:41.

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Three

Resisting the Matriarch

To accept and integrate and strengthen both the mother and the daughter in ourselves is no easy matter, because patriarchal attitudes have encouraged us to split, to polarize these images and to project all unwanted guilt, anger, shame, power, freedom, on to 'other women'.

—ADRIENNE RICH

The first half of the twentieth century saw a symbolic use of the mother as a rallying device, from feminist assertions of women's power as mothers of the nation, to terrorist invocations of the procreative and ravaging mother goddess, to the Gandhian lauding of the spirit of endurance and suffering embodied in the mother.

—RADHA KUMAR

To give good mothering, you have to have received it.

—AARON ESMAN

(A child psychologist)

This chapter is, in a way, a sequel to chapter II inasmuch as it concentrates on resistance offered to the matriarchs as the agents of patriarchy. Patriarchy is an all-inclusive term in feminist theories. In the Old Testament, the 'patriarch' was "the father and ruler of a family or tribe,"¹ and metaphorically, of the church or the religious order. Even in the present context, patriarchy denotes the presence of the male power over the entire socio-cultural matrix. Conversely, the definition of the matriarch is limited to her control in the family particularly to uphold the traditional power structure. Dictionaries define her also as a

female leader in a system in which power passes from the mother to the daughter;² but for our discussion here we take her as a representative of patriarchy who in order to sustain the dominant discourse exercises control over the value-system. Feminism attributed patriarchy to the realm of ideology and gave the term a new meaning, arguing that its overthrow depended on a cultural as well as a social revolution. Kate Millet broadened its scope viewing it as an overarching system of male dominance. For the feminist sociologist Sylvia Walby, patriarchy is “a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby 1990: 214). When a woman, as an agent of patriarchal norms, acts with oppressive power politics and represses her daughter or daughter-in-law she is resented and feared as a matriarch. She may not be the proverbial ‘bad mother’ and may act with good intentions for the wellbeing of the female child, or she may just be as insecure and may want to protect the girl from the patriarchal institutions, but many a time her moves are misinterpreted and as Nancy Friday argues, the girl child who did not get enough “symbiotic closeness as a child becomes a problem of juggling security v. satisfaction” (Friday 1987: 62). There are situations in life and in literature in India when the matriarchs are resented, opposed and hated. This discussion starts on that premise.

Fundamental to the debate of patriarchy is the problematic of human agency. When understood in relation to women’s lives, agency has often taken the form of resistance against power tactics. The domination/subordination binary is central to the concept of power, but as the convergence of space/gender reveals, the agents of power and the arena in which power is exercised are changeable and as such it is not easy to distinguish between the dominator and the dominated.³ This is particularly obvious in the mother-daughter tension dealt with creatively in which mother, the woman, is both the dominated (under patriarchy), and the dominator (as patriarchy’s agent). Somehow, in the

current Indian context motherhood stands between the feminist agenda to displace it from its idealized place in the culture and to ascertain its traditional place as a symbol of power. Despite the high place mother holds in the Indian psyche, the Indian women writers choose to replicate the Western feminist models of motherhood and mothering, focusing on the middleclass girls'/women's conflicting relationships with their mothers. This is mainly due to the rapid social and cultural changes as also to the strong inclination of the authors to portray the mother as an individual, not as an infallible deity. Radha Kumar discusses the image of the mother and motherhood during the early years of the freedom struggle as the symbolic force for the nationalists. Mother India, mother goddesses and even the biological mothers were invoked for their maternal strength and were viewed with reverence for their feminine power to chasten (Kumar 1993: 2). Mothers were perceived as the builders and preservers of the culture and the state and hence as the repositories of national identities. The fundamental shift occurred during the second half of the twentieth century when women creative writers started redefining the parameters of what constituted motherhood. It was a process of cultural translations and hybridizations to ascertain speaking positions from which to refer to the concept of modernity. The mother figure in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* as an all-compassing presence is rarely found in the second and subsequent generation women writers.⁴

II

Keeping in view the changed perspective of the 1980s onward this chapter reads the mother-daughter relationship in three novels, with references to three more to substantiate the discussion. The novels resisting patriarchy, viz. Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*, Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* and Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings* studied in the preceding chapter are analyzed

further to investigate how by offering resistance to the matriarchs the picture of the resistance consciousness of the protagonists becomes inclusive. *The God of Small Things* (Arundhati Roy), *The Thousand Faces of Night* (Githa Hariharan), and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (Shashi Deshpande) to be analyzed in subsequent chapters also create complex mother-daughter schism giving a sufficiently clear glimpse of mother's authority/helplessness. Daughters' resistance is seen here from two angles—the situation of dissonance and the subsequent reconciliation. Adrienne Rich makes some basic observations about mother-daughter understanding in the transmission of knowledge and experience common to them because of their gender. “Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other—beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival—a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, pre-verbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other” (Rich 1976: 220). Nancy Friday also opines, “When one woman gives birth to another, to someone who is like her, they are linked together for life in a very special way” (Friday 1987: 39). Conversely, mother-daughter conflict is the result as much of socio-cultural factors as of psychological. One of the reasons, Jasbir Jain points out is “power”. Discussing Shashi Deshpande's novels, Jain categorically remarks, “Motherhood is egocentric, it gives a sense of power, power that women may not necessarily wield in the wider, social world” (Jain 2003: 59-60). This power can be in the shape of personal control over the child or social/patriarchal restrictions imposed particularly on the girl child. It is the latter that women characters resist in the novels.

The reason for the daughters' anger is located in the narrative patterns. Since the mother is “the first pedagogue of the do's and don't's” (Ramamoorthi 1991: 41), she is the source of anger, resentment and emotional pain for the daughter. A quick look at the conversation between Saru and her mother (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*) would suffice as an example of the verbal give

and take that later augments the mother-daughter bitterness. As young Saru and her brother play out in the sun, the mother comes down heavily on Saru:

“Don’t go out in the sun. You’ll get even darker”.
 “Who cares?”
 “We have to care if you don’t. We have to get you married”.
 “I don’t want to get married”.
 “Will you live with us all your life?”
 “Why not?”
 “You can’t”.
 “And Dhruva”.
 “He is different. He’s a boy” (45).

Let us take another brisk conversation between Karuna and her mother (*Socialite Evenings*):

“It’s not possible to go to Delhi for two days. It takes that much time in the train.”

she [mother] said without looking up from the *puris* she was frying.

“I’ll be flying.”
 “Who is taking you—that woman?”
 “Yes. They want us to take the show we did to Delhi.”
 “Who is they?”
 “Some jeweller.”
 “Father will not hear of it” (33).

Later Karuna’s elder sister takes up the issue and upbraids her, calling women like Anjali “no better than prostitutes.” Karuna retaliates:

“So?”
 “Don’t you feel ashamed?”
 “No.”
 “You’ll ruin your whole life ... your future. No decent man will marry you.”

“I don’t want to marry a decent man. He’ll probably bore me to death.” (33).

Being a “girl” seals the fate of both Saru and Karuna and makes them defiant. The rancor and the helplessness of being women, like their mothers, seeps in into their psyche and they resent identifying with their mothers. The daughters face the dilemma of the difficult choice of either rejecting the mother or replicating her. What the daughters come across is the mother’s restrictive life as a homemaker. They also see her economic powerlessness, her annoying fruitless attempts to live through her children and her years of thankless, stultifying service as wife and mother (Friday 1987: 62). They resent her lack of a sense of individual self-worth, the result of oppression. To digress a little, in her research on lifestyle as resistance of the courtesans of Lucknow, Veena Talwar Oldenburg makes an interesting and relevant observation: in order to induct the new-comers into the profession, it is a practice among the inmates of the *Kothas* to enact small song-dramas showing the thankless toil of an average housewife, “highlighting her existence without dignity” and the repressive marital relationship (Oldenburg 1991: 41).⁵ These performances are designed to illustrate how their life as independent women is better than the shackled existence of a wife and mother. Such reversals of social perceptions are subversive strategies meant to resist the hegemonic culture. In a home, a girl observes her mother’s helplessness, her thankless existence and her subservient status, she rejects the mother as powerless but when the daughter encounters the mother’s power as the matriarch despite the many handicaps and disadvantages of her position, the daughter’s rejection gives way to hate.

Saru’s mother wielded enormous power, that was Saru’s undoing; Kalyani’s mother Manorama in *A Matter of Time* imposed her indomitable will, that was Kalyani’s misfortune; in Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*, the mothers as patriarchy’s agents clamp social and familial norms on the daughters

and generate revolt; and in Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings*, the mother's submissiveness and subservience becomes the cause of Karuna's waywardness and search for money power. Despite the astutely woven hate-hate relationships in these and many other novels, there runs an undercurrent of appropriation of the sublime for the mother. This has a powerful impact and it helps in structuring the daughters' identities. For both male and female infants, mother is the prime love object, but "it is their sex, their sameness that distinguishes what a mother has with her daughter" (Friday 1987:39). The daughters understand the significance of this bonding only when they themselves become mothers. This helps in reducing the tension. With the reduction of the conflict the myth of motherhood is understood in the light of the reality of "her-story" and the image of the mother is purified. Consequently, the daughter is relieved of her burden, and with the newfound bonding she feels equipped to challenge the patriarchal regime. Female bonding, in fact, offers new paradigms to contextualize female heritage.

The reworking of the sense of self as a constant, indwelling presence, has been on the agenda of much feminist theorizing. When feminists theorized mothering and motherhood their main concentration was on identity. Attempting to define the link between the personal and the political, feminists had to redefine the feminine identity. How do we get that identity? What does it mean to be a woman? The need probably was to re-write the feminine self so that women discover themselves through their mothers. Since for a woman social mandate of motherhood is indisputable in the definition of womanhood, female creative writings underscore how the hegemonic systems of gender, womanhood and motherhood imbricate with the problematic of modernization/westernization versus tradition. Contradictions and complications arise when women deny their mothers and yet paradoxically, they reach self-definition only when they identify with their mothers. Caught between what is

unique to woman and to the culture they sideline the discourses of both westernization and tradition trying to tell the story of agency. But whose agency? This is a difficult proposition that requires to be probed. Feminism as such is consistently connected with Western, white feminism having a political agenda. In that case how does it fit into our cultural concepts? Even if we agree to bell hook's definition of feminism as not just a belief in ending women's oppression but "a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeate the Western culture" (hooks 1981: 194), we cannot avoid intersecting our paths with the Western ideology. One can, however, argue that there is nothing wrong with woman's becoming aware of some of the injustices in the position of women and with her initiative to remove them. One of the recognizable ways is to evince a different kind of feeling of resentment toward the social constructs that give condescending treatment to women, and since the mother is the most viable symbol of authority, it is easy to start with her. The examples of Saru, Karuna, Rahel (*The God of Small Things*), and Ida would suffice to substantiate the point.

In contemporary Indian literature written in English, the mother has been accorded visibility through the presentation of the mother not as the superhuman matriarch but as a fallible individual towards whom the female child develops ambivalent feelings, a love-hate relationship. The mother's image appears negative particularly in women's writing. In many of the narratives, the girl child seems to be antagonistic to the mother, denouncing her for imposing rigid codes of set behaviour. The consequences of this are at once liberating and disempowering. The daughter, in order to oppose the structures of exploitation, offers resistance to the mother as the matriarch who is at one and the same time a woman and a representative of patriarchy. It is only when the daughter reconnects with the mother through memories and unwritten histories of the male hegemonic power that the daughter is able to identify with the mother and validate

the self. Some feminist thinkers have analyzed quite potentially and convincingly the reasons why women often defend the status quo and act against the interest of their gender becoming obviously complicit with patriarchy. In studying the political participation of women in Chile, a critic remarks that women often act in “unfeminine” manner in the name of motherhood and womanhood (Wayden 1992: 99-314) to ensure for themselves empowerment with male support and protection which another critic calls “patriarchal bargain” (Kandiyoti 1988:277)

A Matter of Time portrays three generations of women, three mothers and three modes of resistance to patriarchy. The institution of motherhood is seen through the institution of marriage and the social conditions. At the top is Manorama, Kalyani’s mother who is the most dreaded figure; Kalyani, the mother of Sumi and Premi is a helpless presence, almost pathetic as a rejected wife (though as discussed earlier, her strength lies in her silent resistance); Sumi, the mother of Aru, Charu and Seema is not the proverbial weak, repressed or wronged woman. Aru has reasons to be impatient with Sumi for her stoicism or will-lessness to fight for her right, but she finds no ground to pity or reject her. Sumi stands on her own displaying a poise that speaks of the changing social psyche.

The part entitled ‘The Family’ provides in flashes the picture of Manorama, the matriarch, who rules the roost in Vithalrao’s household. The past comes alive as Aru observes, “filtering through ... memories” (119) of Goda and Kalyani, but these revival exercises are not of happy moments; particularly when the two speak of Manorama, a kind of “discord” seems to prevail, “a sense of something missing, something held back” (120). To put it simply, Manorama’s story is one of success and good fortune—an eventful journey from a poverty-stricken girlhood to a marriage into the rich and famous family of Vishwasrao, a known name in contemporary history, ensuring for her status, social esteem and money-power. Manorama learns to use all this

discreetly to her advantage—but she learns it the difficult way. Hurt by all those who consider Manorama, the girl from a poor family, below their social status, Manorama takes charge of her life with a vengeance to show them what she could accomplish. She educates her young brother Shripati, and makes sure that he feels indebted to her; she earns social goodwill by participating in social welfare activities for women and elevates herself as Vithalrao's companion. "Manorama had taken charge of her own and her husband's life, she had given it a shape that was to dazzle everyone. She herself took an enormous pride in her husband's position and her own public activities which included instituting, with her husband's support, a school for girls: the Yamunabai Pawar School for Girls" (154).

This able woman, the erstwhile self-assured girl despite her patched clothes, is a failed mother (or so the narrative rhetoric would have us believe). First it is the birth of a girl child, Kalyani, which lowers her social status; to add to this, Kalyani grows up to be a frail and timid girl, unsure of herself and almost "mulish" in her stubborn silence. Kalyani stands opposed to everything that Manorama had dreamed of. In desperation the mother, Manorama, is harsh to her. Manorama terrorizes her, particularly after the little, innocent, failed love affair:

Manorama made it seem that Kalyani had done something obscene, she asked her questions the girl did not understand and could not answer. Terror drove her into dumbness and to her mother her silence confirmed her guilt. Vithalrao, realizing that his attempts to shield her made thing worse, withdrew. Even the family priest was touched by the girl's plight, but no one dared to speak to Manorama (150).

With this Kalyani's schooling ends and she is forced into a marriage she never wanted, to a man she dreaded—Shripati, her maternal uncle. After Kalyani returns as a deserted woman, Vithalrao dies of shock and grief. For Manorama, it was as if Kalyani had killed him. She indicts her without qualms, "you

are my enemy, you were born to make my life miserable" (153). This reminds us of Saru's mother (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*) accusing Saru of having killed Dhruva, her brother, and cursing her with the most damaging words, "why are you alive when he is dead," and also Kasturi's lament (*Difficult Daughters*) that Virmati killed her father. As if this were not enough, Manorama becomes tyrannical and even suspicious during her illness, and fears that Kalyani wanted to kill her too. Kalyani becomes her "mother's despair." Manorama laments that her daughter "destroyed" everything Manorama had stood for. Kalyani, "the girl who had seemed such a weak, feeble creature, was the one who defeated her mother after all" (154), with her silent defiance, doggedly stubborn attitude and ability to withstand her mother's cruelty. Kalyani's silence "that gives Aru the feeling of a shutter having come down" (149) is not the silence of the weak, the mute, but a deliberate act of retribution. Her silence born out of terror of her mother and of her uncle-turned-husband soon becomes a strong counter hegemonic weapon. While the contestatory role of silent rebellion may strike as surprising to many because of the complicity of female tradition in power relations and the consequent lack of voice, it may be said that because the daughter/wife (Kalyani in this case) did not step out of the patriarchal power circle, her resistance became a non-antagonistic but potent challenge to patriarchy.

In her interview with Lakshmi Holmstrom, Shashi Deshpande talks of Indian women's inner strength and subdued anger. Referring to "the total unawareness among men" about female anger she admits, "I don't know whether women have been very successful in concealing their anger, or whether men have simply closed their ears" (Holmstrom 1998: 249). Kalyani's impenetrable silence is an indictment of the entire system. But unfortunately it also boomerangs on her. As Aru and Seema recast the tragic incident of Kalyani's son walking away, getting lost for ever, they hint at a terrible possibility that maybe Kalyani,

their grandmother, just let him be lost because she wanted to be free from the life-long burden of looking after a demented son. The older women, mothers themselves shudder at such a weird thought, knowing that a woman, a mother, would never resort to such an inhuman act. This doubt arises in the young minds (Aru and Seema) because of Kalyani's refusal to explain or to justify. For the new generation girls, it is significant to clarify and justify if you are not guilty, that "you speak out, state the truth, that you stand up and defend yourself, that you refuse to be misjudged" (143). For Kalyani, silence is the best possible shield against any further attack or questions; it is also the best way to hide her agony and guilt—guilt for her failure as a mother. Silence defines Kalyani, becomes a focal point of her consciousness and gives her problem a complex nature. Ultimately, it becomes the matrix of her relations and gives a pious kind of indignation to her suffering, to the injustice of it all.

The rhetoric weighs so much in favor of the "poor girl" Kalyani, terrified of her mother that the author's mimetic portrayal of the unjust social order slides out of sight. Several questions that need probing are: was Manorama the she-monster she is painted as? Was Kalyani the unwanted, tortured, unloved daughter? Did Manorama really have an autonomous power to terrorize and tyrannize? There is scant doubt that Manorama *did* wield power like Saru's mother did (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*); that Manorama was determined and stubborn; and that she took all her decisions with a clear goal in view. The decisions are harsh but they are eloquent of her resolve—never to visit her parental family, to support her brother's education, to stop Kalyani's schooling, and to marry Kalyani to Shripati so that the property remains in the family. In these and many other matters, Vithalrao stands at the periphery. Still, in the social system Manorama, as a woman, has no personhood. She acts not as much on her own volition as on the patriarchal authority. Her inability to beget a son makes her insecure. Afraid that Vithalrao may marry another woman

to get a legitimate male heir to the property, she acts in frenzy. This is not an accidental situation; it is connected with women's status as social and legal persons. As a mother Manorama was not vile. Probably, she would have reconciled to her lot could she live vicariously through her daughter:

And yet Kalyani is right in playing down everything but her mother's disappointment in her, for it was that which played the biggest role in her life. Manorama wanted a son, instead there was Kalyani. Not an unloved child, no never that. But for Manorama, she became the visible symbol of their failure to have a son. And then, she fulfilled none of the dreams Manorama had for her daughter. Her daughter, she had thought would be beautiful, accomplished, she would make a brilliant marriage that would be Manorama's triumph, that would show them, the family, all those women who had treated Manorama, the daughter of a poor man from a village, with such contempt. Instead there was Kalyani, who could do nothing that pleased her (150-1).

Manorama is a condemned woman and Kalyani doubly condemned. Manorama and by implication the author resist the system and Kalyani resists her mother. That the epigraph to Part-2 'The Family' should focus on the significance of a son is an eloquent comment on the undesirability of a daughter (discussed in the previous chapter):

Whatever wrong has been done by him,
his son frees him from it all;
therefore he is called a son.
By his son a father stands firm in this world (91).

Manorama suffers because she has no son, Kalyani is deserted because her son is lost; Saru's mother almost discards Saru after Dhruva's death by drowning. The theme of woman's craving for son ensnares her and gives negative signals. In such a set-up how could one expect narratives of happy and an autonomous women's culture?

The Dark Holds No Terrors builds a powerful rhetoric of hate-hate relationship between Kamala (Saru's mother) and Saru. Saru categorically mentions how she "detests" her mother thus sealing the possibility of any future improvement. The narrative throbs with the ominous presence of her spiteful remarks, "if you are a woman I refuse to be one" (62-63). There is so much exchange of bitterness and unkind words that the venom seeps into the life of both. "I hated her, I wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer. But did not know how"? (142). The mother in her turn negates and rejects her, "What daughter? I have no daughter" (109). "Daughter? I don't have any daughter. I had a son and he died. Now I am childless" (196). When Saru announces that she was marrying Manohar, her mother's words "you won't be happy with him," have the sinister effect of a curse (98). And when Saru is really unhappy with her sadist husband, she blames her mother, "if you hadn't fought me so bitterly, if you hadn't been so against him, perhaps I would have never married him" (96). They are in fact, at a point of no return. Earlier, if Kalyani resisted her mother with her silence, Saru fought her mother with iconoclastic rage.

But the question is, is Saru fighting her mother or by resisting her, she is denouncing the social system, the institution of marriage, and the age-old traditions, which marginalize a girl? Another question that can be asked is: has Saru been an unloved daughter? No, certainly not! The author hints at her mother's affection. Mother would take her to the temple, to the all-woman *Haldi-Kumkum* celebrations; she gifted her gold earrings for her birthday. She does all that as any traditional mother could have done for her daughter; all that the mother thought was important for her upbringing as a girl. For spirited Saru these are not enough in the face of mother's partial attitude. The reasons for Saru's anger are not difficult to trace. In addition to her gender bias, Saru's mother lays strict norms for her, giving all the latitude to Dhruva and clamping restrictions on her. This

is due to her anxiety to inculcate the socially accepted feminine virtues in Saru. Saru's mother exerts her power and without any evil intentions generates a vicious atmosphere. The final and deadly blow is dealt to Saru when after Dhruva's death the grief-stricken mother charges the child Saru with murder. Her words "Why didn't you die. Why are you alive and he dead" (34-35) traumatize the child. Saru can never recover after that. Incomplete and unsatisfying symbiosis stamps her existence. Saru feels rejected. Mother's words hurt more than her small gestures of affection soothe her.

Deep down the compulsion to hate, and despite the rhetoric, there still is an undercurrent of love that binds the mother-daughter duo. That Saru should want to know that her mother died peacefully after forgiving the errant daughter is in itself an indication of concern. She feels hurt; she reacts sharply on learning from her father that that mother never mentioned Saru even at her last moment. As far as her mother was concerned, her denial, "I have no daughter" (109) is the agonized cry of an abandoned mother who has an expectation from her daughter. Indeed, one does not have expectations from a hated enemy. Notwithstanding her denial of her mother, Saru cannot help being her mother's replica after her return home fifteen years later. She instinctively acts like her mother. The deceased mother becomes her role model. A traditional Saru seems to replace the successful Doctor Sarita (Saru) who had once broken all traditions and lived an unconventional life. She busies herself in household chores: sitting on the floor to dress up as her mother did; cooking on the stove squatting in the kitchen; serving food to Madhav and her Baba. She feels satisfied nurturing them, as her mother would have. She eats her food only after Baba and Madhav are fed. "This gives her self-satisfaction as if a part of her, the nurturing female part is satisfied. In regaining her gender identity with her mother Saru resolves the crisis generated by the ambivalence and separation". (Bande: 2000: 36). Saru who

is used to all modern amenities in her Bombay home enjoys cooking and doing all chores despite the inadequacy of the kitchen in her parental home.

She [Saru] had now begun cooking the evening meal. Nothing much... just rice, dal and one vegetable, even that was an ordeal in what now seemed a primitive kitchen, with its primus stove... took endless long to cook anything. The tap was... so low that you had to crouch to wash up anything... there was no cooking platform. She had to squat on the ground to do the cooking. She marveled now at the way her mother had produced meal after meal from that place. She had been, she remembered dispassionately, a good cook (46).

There is no bitterness here, no concern, neither glorification of the mother, just a summation of the ordeal her mother faced without ever complaining. As she re-enacts mother's way of life, Saru resembles her mother in all her actions so much so that her father, Maikaki and Madhav, affirm the resemblance. The author puts it succinctly:

The gestures, the actions, the very words that accompanied them were, though she did not realize it, her mother's. As if she was unconsciously, unknown to herself, mimicking the mother she had never admired, never endeavoured to imitate. But there was in her, as she made tea, curious confusion. I've done this before. No, not I, but my mother... she went on jumbling herself with the dead women, sometimes feeling she was acting out a role, sometimes feeling she was mother herself (106).

This discreetly shows that the disconnection of relationship with mother does not really remove the trace of a long primary identification with her mother. Saru gives in to melancholia till her rage at her 'bad mother' pesters her. Her memories of her mother plague her and unconsciously accuse her of murder of her brother. Her aggression is turned inward resulting in self-hate, sadness, and flashes of depression. Hate becomes the dominant motif not only of her own life but also of the narrative, and the

mimetic portrayal of Saru's longing for her mother is tailored to her unpleasant experiences. "The rhetoric is so powerfully built around Saru's hate that critics easily take the obvious clue and project Saru as an iconoclastic new woman out to break all relations and traditions with impunity. But the author subtly balances the mimesis and artistically renders a character torn by inner strife. The mimetic portrayal is of a woman who is sorely unhappy for having broken her ties with her mother" (Bande 2000:35).

Mother-daughter crisis in this novel remains unresolved because of mother's death, but Saru feels relieved after she identifies with her mother. She broods over her own positioning in life: "The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife... persons spiked with guilts. Yes, she was all of them, she could not deny, that now. She had to accept these selves to become whole again" (22). Saru not only accepts herself as she is and has been but also takes responsibility for her self. This act of connecting herself to her "self" relieves her of much of her tension. At the end of the novel, she decides to go to their neighbor's house to attend to an ailing child. Here, she acknowledges her responsibility to the community as a doctor. This integration of her inner and outer realities makes her whole—the daughter Saru and the doctor Saru are one and the same person. She feels empowered as she declares, "My life is my own" (220); she recognizes her selfhood and regains her equilibrium. Nancy Friday's observations accurately sum up Saru's condition. When old feeling of failure and accusations plagues the daughter, she harbors a feeling of rage against her mother. But the day she begins to "walk like mother, talk like her, [she] *become(s) her.*" Friday further observes, "We take in all those parts that once we hated. In this way we can answer the self-accusation that we are glad she is dead: we are keeping her alive (Friday 1987: 435).

It would be a fallacy to imagine that Saru has changed overnight or that the social situations she has been resenting have

transformed for the better. Introspection and distance have given her a new perspective to see the entire period of her traumatic childhood as a nightmare to be best forgotten. If the mother was passing on to her the laws of *stri-dharma*, her education as a doctor has taught her *manav-dharma* which she resolves to follow. Looking at herself as a mother she realizes that after all she, too, has not been an ideal mother. What she has been resisting in her mother is not the mother's individual ignominy but the power of the patriarchal discourse, which does not accord volition and self-possession to women. If Saru has rebelled against her mother so will her own daughter Renu in whom Saru finds, even at the age of nine, a "cold, shrewd, objective observer" (173). This calls to mind Anita Desai's Sita, the protagonist of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* who has disturbing relationship with her teenage daughter Menaka. Discussing the mother-daughter relations in Shashi Deshpande's novels I have observed, in another context, that the mothers of Jaya, Saru and Indu "never were the breeder, the provider, the stabilizing force, the matriarch to be loved, revered and feared" (Bande 1994:141). Yet the daughters cannot dissociate themselves from their memory. Resistance then gives way to female bonding, a tool to counter patriarchy.

Mother-daughter relationship is a growth-oriented relationship that is affected by socialization processes/pressures. In the dyadic relationship the mother usually forges an ambivalent attitude based on the one hand on empathy and on the other, on exigencies of the dominant discourse. Fathoming the depth of mother-daughter bond, one discovers that the mutual responses do not depend mainly on mother-daughter factor but also on socio-economic factors that manipulate the relationship. Western scholars dwell on female bonding and the concept of sisterhood. But Indian scholars feel that these concepts cannot be fully applied to the Indian socio-cultural matrix. Vrinda Nabar, for example, points out that there is a significant difference between

the Western and Indian female bonding though the basic nature of female bonding around the world is similar. She contends:

The concept of female bonding, which Western feminists emphasized, has operated in societies like ours for a very long time, but its special nature is conditioned by the differences between individualistic version of the West and our own perception of community-membership as a basic duty. Such membership may mean an intolerable loss of individual freedom in the western world's view, which the Indian may perceive as spiritually fulfilling (Nabar 1995: 37).

Nabar feels that in India the dependence of one generation of women upon the earlier one is far from salutary because women pass on to the younger generation the laws of '*Stri-dharma*', which are backed up by patriarchy and become an instrument of oppression. This aspect of growing up stirs anxiety and anger, for if it transmits fear of sexuality, it also crystallizes their consciousness about cultural demands of respectability. The ambiguity of the situation underlines, on the one hand, notions of lack of women's agency, and on the other, suggests the strategy of control through the mother.

The cultural construct of *Stri-dharma* helps sustain the hegemonic definition of gender and sexuality by encoding social prescriptions, which the educated and aware daughter chooses to resist. The point in focus is the mother-daughter relationship in *Difficult Daughters*. The novel opens with Ida, Virmati's only daughter, categorically denying her mother, "The thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother"(1), and proceeds on with Ida's search, her discovery of her mother's strength, her own resentment, her effort to reconstruct her mother's past till finally with words she forges a connection with her mother. Ida closes the story with an equally categorical statement, "This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion. I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be. Do not haunt me any more"

(259-9). Between these two situations, one of resentment and the other of quest, lies the story of three generations of women; Kasturi, Virmati, and Ida—each generation a shade more fiery and active than the previous one.

Since Ida embarks on a journey of discovery, it would be relevant to analyze her relations with her mother. If we surmise from the first two and the last two pages of the novel and a few chance remarks, we discover that Ida often resists her mother when she is alive. The exchange between them is often flippant:

“...[W]hen I die...I want no shor-shaar. I don't want a chautha...no one informed.”(Virmati)

“Why bother having a funeral at all?” (Ida)

“Why do you deliberately misunderstand me?” (Virumati counters)
(1).

Such exchanges often end in bitterness, questions and counter-questions. Ida remembers how she “grew up struggling to be the model daughter. Pressure, pressure to perform day and night” (258). Ida also remembers how her mother “tightened her reins” as Ida grows older declaring that it was for Ida's own good. The situation is not much different from what Virmati faced as a girl—the tightening social and familial control—or for that matter what girls in general face. The only difference is of times. While during Virmati's growing up period in the pre-partition Punjab, the social norms were stricter, during Ida's time things have changed considerably. Growing up in contemporary Delhi Ida can afford to have and express her views. When her mother presses her to do better in education, Ida counters:

“There are other things in life,” she [Ida] told her mother.

“Like what?” asked Virmati

“Like living.”

“You mean living only for yourself. You will disappoint your father.”

“Why is it so important to please him?” Ida protested...(257).

Like Saru (discussed earlier), Ida disappoints her mother by the assertion of her individuality, by denying being submissive and passive in the typecast of the cultural role model. But whereas Saru is bright and has ambitions, Ida shows no signs of intellectual brightness, gets into a marriage that does not work, is forced to abort her child and subsequently she gets a divorce. While Saru and Kalyani are made to feel guilty for their failure to measure up to their mothers' ideas, by Ida's time, individualism makes inroads in the middle-class Indian culture and recognizes a person's potential to be himself/herself and Ida has freedom to be what she is. In her case, divorce is not a stigma whereas during Kalyani's times being deserted was the worst of sins. Kalyani resists with stubborn silence, Saru with anger and Ida with flip-pant disregard. This could also be due to the locale and the era in which the stories move. Virmati's story is set in pre-partition Punjab, and Ida's life moves in the post-independence Delhi; the changing social set up is obvious here. Deshpandé's narrative (*A Matter of Time*) works in Karnataka of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century that saw the rise of resistant voices like those of Pandita Ramabai, Tara Bai Shinde, Jannaka and others in Maharashtra which also affected the Marathi-speaking communities of Karnataka. There was a strong anti-hegemonic wave and the text shows this. Saru's story is set in contemporary Bombay and the middleclass ethos is obviously one of change, particularly in the metropolis.

Coming back to Kapur's novel, Ida remembers her mother as a "silent, brisk and bad tempered mother" when she was alive (2) and admits that she does not recall a time when "it had been right between us." After her death however, she feels an unbearable "rawness" and is desperate to find a connecting link with her. What Sudhir Kakar says in *The Inner World* applies to this conditions, "The special maternal affection is reserved for daughters, contrary to expectations derived from social and cultural prescription, is partly to be explained by the fact that a

mother's unconscious identification with her daughter is normally stronger than with her son" (Kakar 1981: 60-61). Ida visits Lahore, goes to the college where Virmati had studied and slides into memories. She enacts her mother sitting on a bench as a young student, and makes desperate efforts to weave a lasting connection with her mother.

Manju Kapur deals with mother-daughter relations at three levels—(i) Kasturi and her mother, (ii) Kasturi and Virmati (Kasturi's daughter) and (iii) Virmati and Ida (Virmati's daughter). The bond between Kasturi and her mother was simple. Kasturi was happy to be cast into the stereotype image of a woman and she readily learnt the feminine skills because her aim in life was well identified—marriage, home, husband and nurturing his children. Things become difficult when the daughters learn to dream, to awaken to the question of identity and to assert their individuality. This is what happens to Virmati and later to Ida. Virmati is spirited and adamant. She does not hate her mother but she cannot be like her mother—always pregnant with no voice to resent it. A generation later, Virmati's daughter also does not wish to be like her mother. Ida is more vocal in rejecting her mother. In rebelling against Virmati, Ida also rejects her own womanhood and follows her own whims. Despite this Ida experiences a strong bond with her mother, "without her, I am lost, I look for ways to connect" (3) she says and embarks on a project to write her mother's story. In fact, motherhood does not only enhance the status of woman—the mother—it also negotiates security for the daughter by ensuring compassion, understanding and support. The significance of "connecting" is shown by Anita Desai also in her *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*. Sita feels relieved of much of her stress and strain when she is able to "connect." The act of setting out on a quest and then to write out the mother's life keeps Ida connected with her mother. It would be relevant to remark here that the quest motif is strong in women's writing. In Ruth Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* too the

unnamed heroine reaches India in search of her grandmother's life and through her, she understands her own urges.

Ida's interviews with Virmati's brothers and sisters (Ida's aunts and uncles), and with Swarna Lata and her visits are exercises of re-discovery. "This is where my mother sat and waited out the periods of time that fate had employed to divide her from her married life... I drink in all these details; I take photographs at every turn in the staircase, the corridors, the classrooms..." is a desperate effort to forge a bond, weave a lasting connection with her mother (127). Virmati's life makes sense now. Her own experiences assimilate in the already existing text of her mother's history. Ida feels one with her mother who had to undergo an abortion to avoid bringing an illegitimate child into the world, particularly after Ida goes through the trauma of a forced abortion. As the emotional and physical pain becomes vibrant, Ida could understand her mother's dilemma. She remembers how Virmati's eyes looked confused and her face went blank whenever her daughter demanded a story about her Lahore days (236). Her empathic relation is discernible in the following soliloquy:

I knew, mother, what it was like to have an abortion. Prabhakar had insisted I have one... Mother I never told you this. Why should I burden you with my heartaches when you had enough of your own?... You never really got to see the dynamics of our relationship close at hand. That was some consolation to me, though it meant that you respected, a successful academic, a writer of books, a connoisseur of culture, a disseminator of knowledge like my father (144).

Adrienne Rich provides a convincing argument against abortion and states, "No free woman ...would 'choose' abortion" (Rich 1976:268), and if she did, it would be to inflict a kind of penance on herself, an "expiation," or maybe a kind of violence against herself.

Looking back at the generation of Kasturi and her daughter Virmati, we find that Kasturi's attitude towards Virmati smacks

of unconcern and neglect. That, however, should not cause us to surmise that Kasturi is callous; the only problem is that Kasturi is not expressive. As a mother Kasturi is worried for her, she is sorry that her eldest daughter is burdened untimely with her younger siblings and household responsibilities; but in face-to-face situations, there always seems to be a kind of conflict. Somehow, “The language of feeling had never flown between them” [Virmati and Kasturi] and Kasturi often dismissed with exasperation Virmati’s attempts to get acknowledgement for her devotion to the family. It was because Kasturi was not accustomed to so much solicitude; in addition, she was often tired and sick, and overburdened with the enormous duties of a housewife and a mother, which left her with hardly any energy to demonstrate and express her love and concern for Virmati and other children. Her daughter’s intense quest for higher education and struggle to be free from the stereotype image of woman is beyond Kasturi’s comprehension. Schooled in the traditional image of womanhood she saddles Virmati with her own patriarchal beliefs: “It is the duty of every girl to get married... what is the need to do a job? A woman’s *Shaan* is in her home” (13). This is reminiscent of the attitude of Karuna’s mother who exhorts Karuna, “A woman cannot live alone. It is not safe. We are here today—but who knows about tomorrow? A woman needs a man’s protection. Society can be very cruel” (275). Similarly, Virmati’s, “what will happen to you when I am gone,” often irritates Ida. Neither Karuna’s mother (*Socialite Evenings*) nor Virmati’s mother, Kasturi, can sympathize with their daughters’ views—Karuna’s quest for a career and Virmati’s for higher education. For Kasturi, a woman’s success or failure lay in her marriage and her ability to nurture her family. Failure in examination was no occasion for distress. Such ideological points of view from which these protestations of ‘femininity’ were made were in consonance with the patriarchal order. The most important transmitter of the patriarchal ideology is

the mother and if the daughters have any inclination towards self-discovery or self-assertion, it generally leads to confrontation. Kasturi's rhetoric is "she should have married after Inter" because education has made her conceited. "She feels she knows more than her own father and mother" (85), Kasturi laments. She further insists:

If you cannot consider your duty to us, at least consider yourself. There is a time in the cycle of life for every thing. If you willfully ignore it like this, what will happen to you? A woman without her home and family is a woman without moorings (102).

The cold war between Virmati and her mother continues till it seems to have reached a point of no return. But the author subtly shows how each pines for the other. Kasturi often calls her "my poor girl" but not in her hearing and blames it all on the bad "kismet" that the family has (166). Her heart aches to see her daughter's life-style in her hostel room, "My poor girl... living in a solitary, poky little room in a strange city, for eating hostel food, for the loneliness of single life" (105). Kasturi's anger flares up after Virmati's clandestine marriage to the Professor: "She married... Betrayed us. Made sure we all are ruined" (205). After this, Virmati is rather isolated from her parental home. Her visits bring on her a torrent of abuses and accusations, even on her father's demise, "Why are you here.... Because of you he died" (221). It takes some time and probably another calamity for the bitterness to subside. As communal riots break out, the family comes closer. Virmati shifts to her mother's home, no one mentions the past and Virmati feels happy after her re-union with her mother. Other narratives discussed here also share this happiness—Karuna sees warmth and joy in her mother's eyes when Karuna returns; Sita (Devi's mother) plans and grooms her garden in anticipation of her return and welcomes her with the soothing tunes of the *Veena*. These narratives provide a sub-text of social and cultural pressures that affect the mother-daughter relations and show the intrinsic longing of the one for the other.

The answer to the mother-daughter conflict can be located in the cultural concept of ideal womanhood. The patriarchal ideology of culture necessarily presents women's subordination to men as normal, natural and legitimate and since women are conditioned to believe that way, they do not contest it. Feminist knowledge enables the younger generation women to identify working of the patriarchal system. The consequent clash between the two creates situations of disagreement and difference. Indian mothers know the significance of holding relationships central to their lives and teach their daughters to continue a relationship by virtue of self-sacrifice. They feel threatened by the imminent, by the idea of a dark future should their daughters fail to fit into the framework of the given patriarchal image of an ideal wife or a daughter-in-law. This is found in fictional narratives as well as in real life situations. To take an example from another text, the mother in *Daughter's Daughters* instructing her daughters, "Girls should not laugh too much" is doing a mother's duty. Devi in *The Thousand Faces of Night* gets the cues to the ideal womanhood through the mythological stories of Gandhari, Sita and others of her grandmother.

The world inhabited and experienced by the mother is to be bequeathed to the daughter. The matriarch knows the pitfalls and recognizing the dangers *en route*, she wants to create a protected space where the patriarchal structure would not endanger the daughter's safety. This brings us to the core of the mother's constant vigil. Not that she wishes to occlude the younger one's reformative zeal and resistant voice, only she wishes her to be secure. Often mothers expect their daughters to derive and learn lessons from their own experiences because they have seen and known what it costs to maintain the web of relationships. When such individualized experiences are recounted in the tone of explicit instructions on appropriate behavior, the daughters view them as threateningly restrictive practices and begrudge them as strategies of power. Virmati resents her mother's interference in

her affair with the Professor, Saru hates her mother's views on her higher education, Karuna detests her mother's constant direction and Ida does not approve of Virmati's counsel to "adjust, compromise, adapt," (236) something Virmati herself ignored. Simon de Beauvoir also agrees that when the mother wants her daughter to learn from her experience, she (mother) is looking at it as her "second chance" to live. Conflict arises when the girl gets older and "wishes to establish her independence from her mother" (Beauvoir 1953:534). According to Friday, mothers are "great permission-givers" (viii) but when the mother does not allow the daughter "separation" from her, and infuses her with her own "fears," refuses to let her grow and tries to keep the symbiotic relationship beyond the psychologically advisable limits, the relationship is particularly damaged. Through the mother the tactics of social control are exercised and the mother as a representative of patriarchy is disliked as the power of oppression. The case in point here is Karuna's flippancy in rejecting her mother.

For Karuna, her mother's life is almost a life-long sentence of imprisonment in the home where Father is the supreme authority. Karuna sees her mother always at the beck and call of Father. "It never mattered what the children's preferences were. It was always him. We were left out of their little world. If not left out entirely, then certainly kept carefully on the fringes. Mother gave Father priority, whether it was at mealtimes or anytime else. Whatever little time was left over from looking after his needs was then almost absentmindedly distributed among the three of us. Father rarely spoke directly to us" (12). From the socio-cultural angle, the mother did perfectly the job of nurturing her husband but Karuna resents it with anger and hostility because her mother is an epitome of a subdued female, mortally afraid of her husband. Whatever the daughters do recoils on the mother who has to bear the patriarch's anger. Though she knows fully well her mother's position—sandwiched between an irascible

husband and a willful daughter—Karuna callously disregards her advice. When things boil up due to Karuna’s unacceptable behavior, in order to maintain domestic harmony Karuna and her mother arrive at an unspoken agreement that Karuna “undertook only those assignments which could be fitted into free afternoons and completed before father got home from the office” and the mother pretended she did not know where Karuna was going three afternoons a week (25). The mother’s solicitude for Karuna’s happiness and family harmony drives the mother to hide Karuna’s clandestine modeling projects from her father but that does not win her Karuna’s affection and deference. Karuna callously goes on to the extent of hurting and unnerving her mother by her rude and blunt statement, “what do you think it is that we will do in the darkness that we can’t do during the daytime?” when the mother objects to her friendship with Bunty (25). It is much later in life that Karuna learns to acknowledge and appreciate the charm of her mother’s simple philosophy of life, “marriage is nothing to be excited or worried about. It is something to get used to” (68) or “look, we all should have done something for Alka but we didn’t and now it’s over and done with ...she doesn’t feel or know a thing and there’s no use your crying and wishing you had done more. You’ve got to lead your own life, so do it” (200). Karuna thinks of her as “that patient long suffering woman” and respects her. After Karuna’s abortion it is “the mother who’d come everyday and sit there staring at me with her eyes full of sorrow. We seldom spoke. There was very little I could say to her, even if I didn’t feel so disconnected. But it was comforting to have her there” (227). When a contrite Karuna returns home to her parents mother takes her under her wings giving Karuna the comfortable feeling of warmth and the wonderful feeling of being “looked after once again” (254).

In the same novel we come across conflict, retaliation and reconciliation between Anjali and her mother and Anjali and

Mimi (her daughter). Anjali's waywardness angers her mother and she squarely blames Anjali for her father's death: "We have suffered enough because of you. . . . first you marry a Musalman. That was when dadaji got his initial attack. Then you go and divorce him. That is what killed your father. . . . Now, do us one last favour—stay away" (101). Conversely, Anjali as a mother is just the anti-thesis of her mother. Though Mimi and Anjali reveal visible signs of attachment, the bond remains at superficial level. Anjali has no time to spare for her daughter; her notion of happiness is in terms of money and she wishes the same for her daughter. She intends sending her to California for "the weather's nice and the boys are well-built" (73). Anjali's approach is so shallow that she cannot see the obvious that her own marital gimmicks have shadowed Mimi's life. Mimi is almost traumatized when she (Mimi) realizes the absurdity of the situation in her home—her mother (Anjali) sharing the bed with Mimi while her father entertains another woman in his bed. Though Mimi's reaction to her mother's second marriage is cool, her anxiety is too eloquent to be concealed. She very conscientiously advises her:

Look mama, it is your life, I can't tell you what to do with it. But if he could dump two wives just like that—he could as well dump you in the future. But if this decision makes you happy, it's fine with me (117).

Mimi loathes her mother's way of life and develops a kind of aversion towards the other sex. Anjali's remedial measures for her daughter's apathy are ridiculous: she offers Mimi a separate accommodation to give her freedom and space. Anjali's attitude to life's problems is one-dimensional and her philosophy of life is trivial. When the unhappy Mimi takes refuge in drugs, Anjali sends her away to a drug rehabilitation center in Switzerland instead of reforming her love, understanding, and parental proximity. She is completely severed from the Indian ethos

and that makes it difficult for an average Indian woman to identify with her.

Psychologists maintain that a woman who fails to get nurturance during childhood demands nurturance from her daughters. This is a secret urge. Failure of the daughter to understand the secret demand makes the mother feel lost, angry and frustrated. Kamla (Saru's mother) is one such case. An analysis of Kamla's childhood, which the author ingeniously suggests with deft touches, highlights her childhood deprivation. Kamla was brought up in her grandfather's house where she and her sister were made to "remember we didn't really belong... we were only tolerated" (194). This led Kamla to be reticent and undemonstrative. Kamla's behavioral pattern affects Saru and Saru's childhood experiences affect her relations with her daughter Renu. Saru tries to give her daughter all she lacked in childhood but Saru is shocked to realize that children's demands have changed over the decades and that she is unequipped, psychologically, to cope with the emerging new notions. Saru got her first earrings when she was fifteen; to make amends, she gets Renu's ears pierced when she was only three and over the years gets her half a dozen pairs of earrings. But Renu is not fond of earrings and she refuses to wear them. Saru tries to give her the kind of birthday she used to have—a gift of her liking, good clothes and an 'aarti' at night—but Renu wants a party, so it has to be that way. If Saru exhorts her daughter to share her presents with her brother, Renu protests, "why do you always scold me? You never scold him... its not fair, not fair" (173). Her daughter Renu's disposition makes her uncertain of herself. She is unnerved because she fails to build a close proximity with her daughter who has "a lack of feeling, of sensitivity in her" (33). Her frantic effort to create a bond with her daughter is an indication of her unquenched thirst to be allied with her own mother.

III

In *The Thousand Faces of Night* mother-daughter relationship is explored from yet another dimension. Sita is a strict disciplinarian, undemonstrative and restrained. Devi craves for her motherly touch but finding her too unapproachable misunderstands her as “too snobbish to caress freely” (85). The only memory of her tender touch was when Devi once fell sick and her mother had caressed her while Devi feigned asleep (85). On close reading, we discover that Sita has covert love and sympathy for her daughter that she conceals to live by her motto of having “order, reason, progress” in life. Because she herself had to acquiesce in order to be an ideal daughter-in-law and wife, she envisions Devi to be perfect in every way and is quite disappointed to see “Devi grow into an awkward, thin, ache-ridden stammering adolescent” and indulging in flights of fancy with imaginary characters (105). The author uses eloquent imagery to describe Devi’s sentiments for her mother after her return from America, like feeling “secure” in the womb that “sucks me in and holds me fast to its thick sticky walls” (13); the development of “a newly made friendship,” making them “a one celled unit” enjoying a “companionable silence” (13-14).

Devi’s return home is an occasion to be proud of for Sita. She could show her relatives who had warned her with “illustrative stories of boys and girls who never came back” (14) that they were wrong, that her daughter Devi is different, “she is special, but she is just as pliant as your homegrown daughters” (15). Wishing a smooth and happy life for Devi she chooses Mahesh from amongst many prospective bridegrooms. Devi is under depression after her marriage and Sita is too perceptive not to notice it. Devi’s elopement fills her with a sense of failure and the resultant anger for having “torn her respectability, her very name, to shreds” (108). In *The God of Small Things*, Mammachi voices almost similar sentiments after the Ammu-Velutha affair

comes to light. But whereas the specter of social order falls on Velutha in *The God of Small Things*, in Devi's case the mother shows restraint. Instead of holding Devi wholly responsible, she questions her own wisdom in choosing Mahesh for Devi, "Did Mahesh the candidate she had batted on, know what was necessary" (108). She patiently waits for Devi to come back to her and the "freed daughter returns to the freed mother..." (Kundu 1999:120) Devi gets a deep insight into Sita's subjective experience of life and dynamics of female growth only after she undergoes the experiences of life. The empathic resonance is discernible in the statements made:

Why was Amma not called Devi? (p 83)

How lonely she must have been.... Her survival.... had been far more efficient, but its pain, for all its subtlety, had been just as deep and perhaps less relenting, because she now looked back on an emptiness unfamiliar to Mayamma (136).

Devi admires her strong and self-willed mother. Devi empathizes with her mother for her strong resistance to patriarchy when she broke her *Veena* to comply with her father-in-law's command. But her sacrifice was never the sacrifice of the weak. It had the force of a revolt. In the bargain, however, what she lost was her own comfort, privacy and needs. Sita and Devi share one thing in common: both are strong-willed but in the older woman her will power became an iconoclastic rage, in her daughter, the spirit to survive by hook or by crook.

In *The God Of Small Things*, Mammachi is a weak and suffering mother whose shadow falls on the girl's upbringing hindering her healthy development. Ammu has seen her mother being ill-treated. Her heart goes out to Ammu, but as a female she is powerless to stop her father's atrocities the way Chako puts on end to the daily battering. Read against the grain of her powerlessness, Ammu's responses to life seem to have profound impact on her behavioral pattern. As for Mammachi, once

Chako exercises his male power to check his father, she becomes willingly and wholly dependent on his good will. Feminists believe that mothers encourage their sons to assert their power so that through their male power the mothers feel elevated vicariously as the creator of power if not its possessor. This exercise of authority by proxy is at the root cause of their troubles with their daughters-in-law. As regards the daughter, the mother finds in her daughter her own replica, her own victimized self and her female self-denial. In anger and frustration at the self, the mother tries to possess and control her. Ammu's discomfiture as against Chako's privileged positioning *viv-a-vis* Mammachi is an eloquent example of a mother's vicarious exercise of power. Ammu resists the entire situation by marrying the first man she comes across—the Bengali Tea Estate Manager. This one unconventional step alienates her from her parents but when in trouble, Ammu goes back to her mother. Mammachi receives her happily though Pappachi maintains his reserve. The shadow of Ammu's life falls on her children and the story becomes, as a critic points out, a “sad tale of a hopeless woman seen through the eyes of her daughter” (Ray 2001: 93). It is quite true that “Women writing about women will symbolically reflect their internalized relations with their mothers and in some measure recreate them” (Gale 1983:79-102). The deprivation of mother's love due to the inevitable separation from her mother has deep implications later in Rahel's married life. She is unable to respond and relate emotionally with her husband, which leads to divorce. Devoid of mother's guiding presence the girl child fails to internalize womanhood and loses her sense of identity and self. The baffling physical and emotional changes leave her confused all her life, “unable to gear up to face life and its realities effectively” (Bande 1994:3).

The fictional cosmos of mothers and daughters, which this section sought to read from diverse angles, has brought forth various revelatory facts. The daughter's behavioral patterns do

not rely entirely on the mother-daughter factor; further, emotions alone do not influence this dyad; various socio-economic factors too manipulate the relationships. Almost all mothers want their daughters to toe the line to avoid social stigma and to anchor a secure place in their lives. The daughters often find such attitude engulfing. Anjali, Virmati, Saru, Margaret Kochamma face opposition from their mothers when they decide to marry men from other communities and the daughters resent this imposition on their freedom. Tension arises when mothers also dissociate themselves from their erring daughters instead of understanding them. It creates bitterness between them. Perhaps the explanation for some of these behavioral practices can be found in the context of the fear of social deprecation and the concepts of cultural propriety because though suppressive, all these mothers at heart have genuine concern for their daughters' well being.

IV

Woman-woman dyad that has come under too strong a feminist glare due its homosexual connotation is, in fact, one of the sources of female resistance to patriarchy. In its healthy aspect, it plays a significant role in identity formation as well as in sustaining women in the patriarchal set-up. In a society where the male and the female worlds are strictly compartmentalized, women find their space in the "inner courtyard" where the feminine atmosphere reigns supreme. Away from the male domain and secure from the male gaze, women try to forge strong ties (not necessarily lesbian) and get a feeling of belonging. This inner domain is usually called the "Zernana" and the typical atmosphere of this world so amused some of the European ladies during the colonial period that they took a fancy to visit the *Zenanas* in the palaces to feel their particular ambience. The concepts of *Andar Mahal* in Bengali literature and the *Purdha*

metaphor in general signify women's enclosures where women find ample opportunity to articulate their problems. In *Inside the Haveli*, Rama Mehta creates a world of female understanding that stands in good stead to counter the dominant culture. A glimpse of the women's world is given in almost all the novels under discussion. It is a kind of sisterhood that forges the bond. It saves women from the potential danger of loneliness and trauma. Mrinal Pande's *Daughter's Daughter* has a strong female community to support women in distress. Since the novel is not undertaken for elaborate study suffice it to say that the female bonding in the novel saves the female inmates not only from "male gaze" but also from societal censure. Female bonding between Devi and Mayamma in *The Thousand Faces of Night* is elevating and strength-giving. Mayamma understands Devi's problem and Devi empathizes with Mayamma's life-stories. Similarly, when Devi's grandmother recounts her the stories of Gandhari, Damayanti and other mythological women, her attitude, intonation and the manipulation of events have secret messages. She links contemporary woman's life and her problems with those of the ancient women so glorified by the male myth making.

In *The Dark Hold No Terrors*, Saru empathizes with Smita and some of her female friends, though their submission and passivity repulses her sometimes. During her stay with her father, Saru instinctively drifts towards the female members of neighborhood and makes an effort to understand their troubles. The friendship of Anjali and Karuna (*Socialite Evenings*) is long standing, mutually supportive and strength giving. Each turns to the other for help, advice and succor in times of need. In *Difficult Daughters* Virmati and her sisters develop a strong bond. Virmati's youngest sister always stands by her and so does her friend, Swarn Lata, the political activist in Lahore.

Resistance works at another level in Indian socio-cultural matrix in the form of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law tension.

It is of deep psychological interest to study how in a culture where a woman gets her acknowledgement by being the mother of sons, the invasion/submission fear gets transmitted and poses a challenge to the relationship. The entry of the daughter-in-law is often perceived as a threat to mother-son bond. She is dreaded as an 'intruder', an 'outsider' responsible for creating a hiatus and disrupting the mother-son relation. A paradoxical kind of resistance is seen here. The fear of encroachment of the mother's power over her son by the daughter-in-law triggers the tug of war to possess him leading to disharmonious relationship. Sudhir Kakar's remarks are perceptive in this regard:

The Indian mother... preconsciously experiences her newborn infant, especially a son, as a means by which her motherly identity is crystallized. ... She tends to perceive a son as a kind of a savior and nurtures him with gratitude and even reverence as well as with affection and care (Kakar: 1996:89).

Over the centuries, antagonism and rivalry has turned the mother-in-law into the image of the dreaded matriarch. Interestingly, in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi remarks candidly that she felt "a sense of relief when I heard that I did not have a mother-in-law" (48). Later, however, Devi nurtures an imaginary closeness with her absent mother-in-law. She keeps her photograph in her room and every morning she wakes up to see that face, which seemed to "look down on me like a guardian angel, a mother unseen" (64). Mayamma, in the same novel, the old retainer in Devi's house, recounts her struggle with her mother-in-law. To understand Mayamma's ruthless mother-in-law one needs to dive deeper into the Indian ethos where the son is regarded as a refuge in the old age. The old woman is annoyed because Mayamma cannot produce children. Another sore point is Mayamma's inability to stop her husband from escaping to his "carnal nights in the fields" (118). Finally, his desertion ignites the mother-in-law's rage. She curses Mayamma for many things:

the birth of a stillborn baby, the abandonment by her husband and the crushing poverty. Mayamma cannot offer resistance because traditionally a bride is not supposed to have a voice of her own. As Kakar says, “the bride usually occupies one of the lowest rungs. Obedience and compliance with the wishes of the elder women of the family, especially those of her mother-in-law, are expected as a matter of course” (Kakar 1996: 73-74).

Resistance to the daughter-in-law is offered even in educated and the so-called elite households. In *The God of Small Things* Mammachi does not approve of Chako’s wife Margaret. Arundhati Roy makes an interesting observation here that Mammachi despised Margaret even without meeting her and she would have “despised Margaret Kochamma even if she had been the heir to the throne of England. It wasn’t just her working class background Mammachi resented. She hated Margaret Kochamma for being Chako’s wife. She hated her for leaving him. But would have hated her even more had she stayed” (167-68).

Similarly, Karuna’s modern and educated mother-in-law is not much different from Mayamma’s poverty-stricken and tradition-bound mother-in-law. She not only wields power over the household, she also plays foul to keep Karuna out of her son’s business dealings. What with exercising control over her son, she distrusts Karuna and spies on her. Her calculating tactics are thinly veiled under the seemingly soft touches of politeness. After dinner, she would instruct “one of the servants to escort me back to our section of the enormous house, with a glass of milk to soothe me to sleep” (63). Karuna remains an obedient daughter-in-law for some time but when her mother-in-law over-steps her boundary, opens her cupboard with a spare key, pries on her and instigates her son against Karuna, she decides to retaliate. By and large, the role of the mothers-in-law is portrayed in negative light in Indian narratives. They are the representatives of the patriarchal society and instruments to protect the dominant group’s interest.

A different role is assigned to Ganga's mother-in-law (Kishori Devi) in *Difficult Daughters*. Initially, Kishori Devi shows no sympathy for Virmati, the enchantress of her son. "All this was her fault. If she had not gone after him he would not have strayed, the family would not be torn apart now" (192). She sympathizes with Ganga because "her life was overShe felt Ganga's claims deep within her, closely identified with her own" (192). She appreciates her as "exemplary, thrifty, efficient, industrious and respectful" daughter-in-law (193). With her positive approach she assuages Ganga's hurt and becomes an anchor to her. In this fight their common enemy is Virmati. But when Virmati is pregnant, Kishori Devi becomes the all-caring mother-in-law, forgets the bitterness, and comes to her assistance. This is an eloquent example of how culturally motherhood elevates a woman's status. Kishori Devi is an unpretentious woman, trying to adjust with life with her simple tenets of the philosophy of day-to-day existence. Hers is a relationship in which resistance and acceptance operate interchangeably.

The relationship of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law is riddled with problems. Vrinda Nabar asks an insightful question, "why are Indian women so manifestly hostile to one another especially in relationships where they could through mutual bonding achieve so much?" (Nabar 1995:185) Probably, here it can be interpreted as resistance in the reverse. Anees Jung's query puts it more succinctly, "Does the home continue to be a haven? Or is it a prison where they find their strength and also realize their vulnerability? Do they from being prisoners themselves turn themselves into jailors, repeating a pattern in the invincible image of their mother-in-law?" (Jung 1987:49). It is the patriarchal mission the matriarchs undertake at the cost of their femininity.

V

Mother-daughter relationship in women authored texts is a power relationship in which the mother as female patriarch acquires a specific and substantive power over the daughter, which she exercises as a special prerogative to train her daughter into the cultural mores. In the socialization of girls, the community of women (mothers, grandmother, aunts and other older females) plays an important role in ushering them in the acculturation process so that they take up the roles of daughter/wife/mother without interrogation and learn the lore of self-sacrifice, nurturance and devotion. This is what the mothers in the novels discussed here have been attempting to do with disastrous results for themselves as well as for their daughters. *Virmati*, *Kalyani*, *Karuna*, *Saru*, *Ammu*, *Ida* resist their mothers' overwhelming presences as suffocating and imprisoning. Almost all the above-mentioned daughters at one stage or the other deny their womanhood by negating their mothers and by expressing hate for them. The sub-texts of the novels thus explode the image of the mother as Goddess and explore the maternal body as a site of patriarchal domination. The daughters instinctively judge the mothers' subordinate status and refuse to be like them.

Power differences rooted in the cultural pattern uphold the patriarchal ideology. One version of it is offered in the novels. Fathers—the patriarchs—do not come under the purview of their daughters' judgmental anger in the discussed texts (except perhaps in Roy's novel). In the rest of the novels, the protagonists are tender towards their fathers and even the fathers appear more understanding than the mothers. Some of them even glorify their fathers as *Devi* does. She often dreams of her mother as a "mountain woman" strong and "ox-limbed" but her father as the "hero" with whom she could fly. It would be preposterous to interpret the inclination as Oedipal; it certainly is the cultural construct. *Kalyani* has tender attachment with her father

and during his last illness she nurses him almost with motherly affection and care, wiping his tears, patting his hand, sting by his side. "He seemed soothed by her presence, something which filled Manorama with angry grief" (152). Sumi, in the same novel never questions her father's attitude; on the contrary, she glorifies his unrelenting pride, his refusal to interact and his dignity to stand on his own. In *Socialite Evenings* Karuna and her sisters are terrified of their father and though Karuna records her father's dominating presence, she categorically admits "in retrospect" that he was not an unkind or cruel man. "Whatever he did to us was done in the belief that he was bringing us right. Interestingly, we didn't resent this" (12). She also extols him for having inculcated "reading culture" in them.

In *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati has high opinion of her father and his authority, while Ida never interrogates or evaluates her father's behavior. The fathers may be ineffective like Saru's Baba or Kalyani's father Vithalrao, the daughters still are deferential to them. Significantly, even the fathers have faith in their daughters: Karuna's father secretly appreciates his youngest daughter's verve and sees potential in her to be an IAS officer; Saru's father willingly funds her medical education despite financial stringency; Virmati's Bauji and Kalyani's Baba wanted them to benefit by education and the Professor has intellectual aspirations for Ida. Unfortunately, the mothers see the dark side and raise a storm. They fear that being educated the girls would set on a course of disaster, and would declare their independence. The mothers counter their daughters' self-confidence with the primal knowledge that aspirations and ambitions may be the reason for their decision to take a different direction, but the modern outlook can at best be the source of awareness, it cannot be the basis of insight and so the consequences of such actions may be ruinous.

While highlighting the problem of womanhood and conversely of motherhood in a male-centered society, the narratives subtly deconstruct the myth of motherhood and allow the protagonist

to reconstruct it after demystifying the picture. The writers problematize the mothers' experiences and focusing on them as females living under the hegemonic restrictive milieu, they first decentralize the mother, only to accord her a voice and a subject position in the story so as to validate and celebrate the mother as female and succeed in showing the institutionalized character of the socialization process. Kalyani's history indicts not Manorama so much as it does the society; in Saru's story the dead mother is the supervising presence as the agent of patriarchy; in Rahel's memory Ammu holds the center-stage; and in Karuna and Devi's stories, the centrality of mother's life cannot be denied. By displacing the mother from the pedestal, the narratives write a critique of the dominant structure. The power given to the mother is an ingenuous ploy of the system to relegate the woman to her space. As the upholder of the 'honour' of patriarchal edifice she not only guarantees future female submission but also willingly adheres to the laid down rules, thus ensuring further that the social boundaries are not transgressed and that the conception of the ideal society are not breached.

That this responsibility of maintaining the honour or the *izzat* of the patriarchal ideology is a veritable burden on the female psyche is amply illustrated by some scholars working in the field of sociological and gender research. Gloria Goodwin Raheja recounts an interesting incident she encountered during her field research. In 1990 Raheja, working among the women of the Gujar caste, asked the women if they aspired to be like Sita, the paragon of wifely virtue and self-sacrifice. "My question was greeted with gales of laughter and a plethora of anecdotes about outwitted husbands and independent strong-willed wives. No one is like Sita nowadays, they said..." But when the same question was raised in the presence of the daughters-in-law, the responses tended to be evasive or they were cast fairly unambiguously within the terms of the dominant discourse of subordination and dependency. (Raheja 1994: 62). Indeed,

the elder women did not wish to diminish their sway over the younger generation by any unguarded response.

Coming back to the novels, the narrative potency of some of the incidents shows the supportive attitude of the mothers despite pervasive hegemonic control. Karuna's mother feels secretly happy to see her daughter's photograph as a model; there are occasions in *Virmati's* life when the mother protects her from society's wrath; and Kamala covertly takes pride in Saru's intellectual abilities. These are their dormant and rarely expressed selves through whom the older women offer resistance to authority but this resistance is so weak that it goes unrecognized. In social practice the matriarch is essentialized as an ideal representative of the dominant discourse and the mainstay of the notions of honour, pride, and identity of the community.

The women writers discussed here attach symbolic value to the concept of maternal ethic but provide widely differing accounts of the impact biological motherhood has on their heroine's lives. Contradictions appear to an extent in De's work that depict (through Anjali) motherhood as a burden but also extols it through Karuna's desire for a child. Another contradiction is visible in the social psyche that expects women to be mothers and also deploy motherhood as a powerful form of social control. Contemporary women writers respond to these pressures in different ways: some begin to comply with social norms, some allow their protagonists to marry, have children and then rebel, and though some of the protagonists reject their mothers they do not reject motherhood. Almost all the daughters accept their own motherhood with pleasure. Ida and Karuna, though new-fangled, feel psychologically and emotionally amputated after their abortions. Conversely, motherhood can be the means of women's autonomy and self-creation. The older generation women do not see motherhood as a marker of women's subjection and self-alienation. But, by and large, divested of their glory, mothers—the matriarchs—are projected

in contemporary writing at once as victims and perpetrators of the despotic regime.

The mothers, grandmothers and daughters—Virmati, Kasturi, Kasturi's mother, Devi's grandmother and her mother (Sita)—condition their female children stressing on community membership as a special duty. They acquire their power through men but the exercise of that power results in hindering individual growth and gives rise to conflict forestalling effective female bonding, generating resistance. This aspect of female relationship creates bitterness. In Black feminist writing also the mothers are depicted as “strong disciplinarians and overtly protective,” that complicate the mother-daughter relationship. Audre Lorde in her *Sister Outsider* recounts how the complications help and yet hinder the daughter's relationship with the world, “My mother taught me to survive from a very early age by her own example. Her silence also taught me isolation, fury, mistrust, self-rejection and sadness. My survival lay in learning how to use the weapons she gave me, also, to fight against those things within myself unnamed.... That anger lay like a pool of acid within me, and whenever I felt deeply, I felt it attaching itself in the strangest places. Upon those as powerless as I” (Lorde 1984:149-50). What Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins or other Black feminists/writers record cannot be applied in totality to our condition because the basic differences between women are rooted in the structure of the culture and the culture's emphasis that privileges patriarchy. But the fundamental fact remains that the problem of women's power over each other is to be understood in the light of the hegemony of control. Had Kasturi empathized with Virmati's passion to go in for higher education, Virmati would not have searched for her redemption in the Professor, which in turn would not have ruined Ganga's married life. Had Saru's mother forgiven her for the accidental death of her son, Saru and Kamla would have lived contented lives. But these are the big ‘ifs’ of life and literature.

Notes

1. For a brief overview of the concept of patriarchy and its feminist definition see, Sonya Andermahr et al. Ed. *A Glossary of Feminist Theory* (London/New York: Arnold, 1997): 193-4. Also see Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990): 214. Walby divides patriarchy into six components: (i) husband's exploitation of their wives labor (ii), relation within waged labor (iii), the state (iv), male violence (v), sexuality (vi), culture. The discussion in this chapter of the present study focuses on the matriarch whom the protagonists resist as the agent of patriarchy through whom patriarchal control is exercised. Patriarchy, in the sense of power of the father over his kinship group was developed in social theory prior to feminists' use of the term. Feminists started using this term in the absence of any other appropriate word to denote men's power and domination over women. At present the concept of patriarchy is used to denote those ideas, practices and mechanisms by which men in general dominate women. The term also connotes the hierarchical character of male power.
2. *Cambridge International Dictionary* defines the matriarch as "an old and powerful woman in a family" or the female leader of a society in which power passes from mother to daughter.
3. See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1986). Foucault argues that although the idea of domination-subordination is intrinsic to the concept of power, one could maintain that it is impossible to identify clear-cut bodies of dominator and dominated. [P]ower ... is not that which makes the difference between those who exclusively possess and retain it, and those who do not have it and submit to it. Power must be analyzed as something which circulates.... [Individuals] are not only its inert or consent target; they are always also the elements of its articulation." (98).
4. See also Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 2000:145). Discussing how the New Woman novels written from the daughters' perspectives feel the power of the patriarchal mothers, Heilmann argues that it is because of the mother's lack of power in the external world, there arises in woman the will-to-power in her relationship with her children. But while the mother enjoys power vicariously through the son, she unloads her anger on her daughter—

- the anger of being victimized—because the daughter represents for the mother her own victimization. “Her need for possessive control and her latent desire for revenge will feed into perpetuating the cycle of female self-denial. The daughter will respond to this absence of positive mothering with resentment and matrophobia. With the bond between mother and daughter severed, the daughter is propelled into a lifelong quest for a mother surrogate” (145).
5. Veena Talwar Oldenburg examines the contestatory relations between gendered subjects and patriarchal authority by drawing upon life style of the courtesans of Lucknow and also by referring to literary texts like Ruswa’s *Umrao Jan*. The study depicts the sub-culture of women who have created lifestyles for themselves and inverted the hegemonic construction of gendered identities. See “Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow,” in Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash, eds. *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford, 1991: 23-61).
 6. For discussion on marriage and motherhood in India see Karin Kapadia, *Siva and Her Sisters: Gender, Caste and Class: Rural South India* (Boulder, Oxford: Westview Press, 1995); Dhruvarajan, “Hindu Women and the Power of Identity,” in Patricia Uberoi, ed. *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*. (Delhi: OUP, 1994). Dhruvarajan narrates how most women describe the early years of their marriage till the birth of a son as “living hell”. See also studies by Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World* (Delhi: Oxford, 1996) and Ashis Nandy, *On The Edge of Psychology* (Delhi: Oxford, 1980), both these give an Indian perspective to understand motherhood culturally and discuss the male and the female attitude to mothers.

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Four

Writing a Voice, Re-presenting Protest—Childhood Experiences as Resistance

I shall grow up to be a tall, graceful, and altogether beautiful woman, and I shall impose on large number of people my will, and also, for my own amusement, great pain.

—JAMAICA KINCAID

Give me back what I have lost, or give me nothing... Rob me of the thoughts, the feelings, the desires that are my life, and you have left nothing to take.

—H. RIDER HAGGARD
(South African Zulu writer)

Women's writing, in an attempt to resist gender politics has been experimenting with different forms and styles and creating what Gerd Bjorhovde calls "rebellious structures,"¹ thus asserting an aesthetic of resistance. Narrative strategies like merging different genre, introducing shifting points of view, using fantasy and body language, mixing incongruous elements, fragmenting narratives and giving voice to the girl-child narrator aim at exploding narrative conventions and locating identity in the space thus created. These are "conscious efforts" designed to solve the problem: "how to step out of the framework defined by men and patriarchal values, and how to identify and create a tradition of their own" (Jain 1992:50) which women share with

other marginalized, postcolonial societies.² These subversive strategies and stylistic innovations are used not only to explore female desire but also to voice the writers' concerns in plurality of forms and to translate their individual observations into socio-cultural questions.

The central dilemma of the feminist discourse has been to ascertain how women gain knowledge about the particular circumstances of their lives and those of others and how they learn to resist. Women have been identifying the sources of resistance to draw on, and childhood experiences as girls emerge as one of the potent sources shaping women's adult psyche and pointing towards family dynamics as well as the socio-political fabric that underscore the gendered norms. Resistance cannot be enacted in a vacuum; it is exercised within and against the social forces and value systems and is thus entangled with traditions and societal norms that affect and shape each other. In their attempt to describe woman as she knows herself, not as man likes to image her, many earlier writers aimed at creating "art for[wo]man's sake" (Bonnell 1995: 123-48). This was particularly undertaken by the First Wave feminists who took to writing for a female audience. These efforts to reconceptualize art and literature point towards the revisionary impulse because women's attempt to "write for women, to write about women and, in some cases, to write women herself, led them [women] to use available forms in new ways and to look for new ... ways of writing" (Pykett 1992: 194). By violating the received notions of narrative form, these writers displayed their inclination to experiment, which became an illuminating exercise reflecting their artistic validity.

Giving voice to a girl child narrator is one of the techniques Indian women writers adopt successfully to emphasize the desirability to make their female protagonists active resisters. Resistance is precipitated by sometimes shifting points of view, or using multiple points of view and the use of humor to bring into

play the interaction of child/adult dialectal, and create a vantage point from which to perceive the entire socio-cultural-political system, merging it with individual experiences so as to induce the will to act against the system. Bapsi Sidhwa in *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988), Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* (1997), and Mrinal Pande in *Daughter's Daughter* (1993), assign the child narrators the task to look at the adult world with the child's innocent 'I' [Eye] and de-create the past in order to discover themselves as women. Whereas *Ice-Candy-Man* and *The God of Small Things* work through the larger backdrop of socio-historical and political happenings which the narrators resist, *Daughter's Daughter* highlights women's restricted life, their choicelessness and the strength gained by sisterhood and women's solidarity through the child narrator's perception; in the process the girl understands the pain of being "doubly-gendered" as daughter in the patriarchal ambiance of her grandmother's house. Devi is vindicated as she gains knowledge about women's world but she is too pre-occupied with her robust activities to get much scope to resist in a meaningful way. This chapter, therefore, analyses only two novels: one by Sidhwa and the other by Roy.

Without being reductive, one can juxtapose the two novels to see how the novelists historicize the loss of innocence by reconstructing the past through memory; and also how by working through the traumas of collective and personal histories construct the narratives as intelligible as they are socio-political. The novels retrieve the knowledge of the past and underscore the necessity to resist. Bapsi Sidhwa's child-narrator, Lenny belongs to the minority community of pre-partition Punjab (soon to become Pakistan); Arundhati Roy's Rahel is from the Syrian Christian community of Kerala of the 1960s. Both are marginalized in the sense that both are female and handicapped: Lenny is restricted because of her polio-affected foot; Rahel is confused by the double-faced laws of the Ayemenem House and the society. Lenny voices the insecurity of her community through overheard adult

anxieties and resists the political scenario and the power game that may end up cracking India and thereby cracking her home on Waris Road or her Godmother's house (Incidentally, it may be mentioned here that the American edition of *Ice-Candy Man* was titled *Cracking India*). Rahel, on the other hand, is witness to power politics/sexual politics, the complex socio-economic structure and the dubious adult ways; she imbibes resistance with a vengeance and enacts it with impunity. *Ice-Candy Man* ends on a note of bewildered acceptance of the inevitable, while *The God of Small Things* culminates in complete severance from the accepted social norms with a hint of incest which tantamount to rebellion. This much, Roy seems to say, for the oppressive social order. Thus by reconstructing the silenced histories of the women of the three communities (Paris, Hindu and Syrian Christian), the writers record the unacknowledged suffering of women, their power to challenge and their capacity to withstand. The shifting perspective of *The God of Small Things* enables us to read it not only as the site of confrontation with patriarchy but also at a higher level as the narrative of historical bases of conflict: political, social, cultural; similarly, *Ice-Candy Man* ceases to be Lenny's story of partition and its trauma when the author endows visibility to the silenced, displaced subalterns and provides reason, through the epigraph to the last chapter, not to disregard and write off the faceless, nameless suffering women like the Ayah but to understand their unique brand of courage to make survival possible. If the "sparrow" could "struggle with the hawk" (Sidhwa 1988:275), women's courage in unexpected ways may offer a new dimension to women's agency.

II

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel has the unique advantage of bearing two titles—the original *Ice-Candy Man* published in Britain and its changed American version *Cracking India* (Minneapolis:

Milkweed Editions, 1991). It is an ‘advantage’ in the sense that the titles pose the artistic possibility of reading the novel within two broad perspectives and then joining the two strains to view its strength as an aesthetic presentation of resistance. The title *Cracking India* and the author’s affirmation in her interviews that she wrote the story of partition because this historic event stayed with her as a part of her childhood memories, uphold its historic-political focus. This has, however, resulted in restricting the novel’s space. Most of the studies examine it as a self-conscious exercise in recording childhood impression of partition from a Parsi-female angle, thus slotting it further. There is no denying the fact that *Ice-Candy Man* is a powerful reconstruct of the traumatic events that destroyed the pace of life, generated hatred and “cracked” the country; it is also an exposition of the Paris psyche caught in the uncertainties of the times. However, as Shashi Tharoor emphatically points out, *Ice-Candy Man* is “not” about partition, it is about “Lame Lenny” and “about a child’s loss of innocence, about world with characters called Electric-aunt, Slavesisters and Oldhusband, about servants and laborers and artisans caught up in events they barley understand, but in which they play a terrible part” (Tharoor 1991:1-3). Robert Ross, an American critic-scholar also observes that the “original title tells more” as it does not subordinate the importance of the human side of the historical upheaval (Ross 1992:369-75). The title *Ice-Candy Man* shifts the gaze from the political arena to human concerns and establishes a direct and consequential relationship between history and the author’s moral vision, between childhood experiences and adult perceptions. The Ice-candy man stands as a metaphor for human shiftiness, cunning and deception; at the macro level, he can be seen as a symbol of the politicians who could hardly be trusted. Thus, the structure of the novel delineates the action at two time levels—past memories and present vision, and gives a renewed perception of the protagonist’s (and by implication the author’s) resistance to

power politics, violence, duplicity, deception and the predator in man. It also problematizes a girl child's initiation into the sources of the forbidden knowledge and places the text within the parameters of woman-centered/woman-authored narrative, which give cultural resonance to historico-political concerns.

The novel begins on three distinctive pronouncements that set the tempo indicative of resistance: first, Iqbal's lines, second, Lenny's description of her restrictive life, and third, her secret awakening to adult female sexuality. Before allowing Lenny to start her story, the omniscient author writes the epigraph to the chapter from Iqbal's "Complaint to God," thus denoting the thematic structure. Iqbal's verse also suggests the breaking of silence. It gives voice to the subaltern—a dejected persona—who complains to God of His partiality and indicts Him rebelliously, "you are no less fickle than we"; and refuses to acquiescence to customary norms in daring Him, "Am I the rose to suffer its [nightingale's] cry in silence year after year?" (1). Lenny starts her story on a negative or rather pessimistic note: "My world is compressed... My child's mind is blocked by the gloom emanating from the wire-mesh screening the oblong ventilation slits. I feel such sadness for the dumb creature I imagine lurking behind the wall. I know it is dumb because I have listened to its silence, my ear to the wall" (1). The seven year old child narrator Lenny empowers herself through her complaint, articulations and her silence. The story quickly moves on after these gender and cultural contestations of silence and articulation, to the girl child narrator as "subject-in-formation" and "subject-to-be-educated," stressing narrative progression. The "chocolate-brown" Ayah, luscious and attractive, and her male admirers exuding lustful love, becomes a source of knowledge about sexuality. Little Lenny begins to learn the meaning of male gaze and the significance of female reticence, a lesson she will soon unlearn. Lenny admits in the beginning of the novel, "The covetous glances Ayah draws educate me" (3). After a couple of years the same Lenny weeps

at the end of the novel for the loss of innocence, and for the mutilated, emptied and silenced Ayah:

The innocence that my parents' vigilance, the servants' care and Godmother's love sheltered in me, that neither Cousin's carnal cravings, nor the stories of the violence of the mobs, could quite destroy, was laid waste that evening by the emotional storm that raged round me. The confrontation between Ice-candy-man and Godmother opened my eyes to the wisdom of righteous indignation over compassion. To the demands of gratification—and the unscrupulous nature of desire. To the pitiless face of love (252).

Though such deep, philosophical summing up of an emotional upheaval cannot be expected from a mere child of eleven or twelve, and authorial intrusion is obvious here, Lenny's thoughts reflect on the nature of history and comment cynically on the necessity to rewrite "her" story to come to grips with those realities that alter the image of the nation.

From the narrative angle, Lenny's story is simple, uncomplicated and linear: it is an account of partition and its aftermath from the point-of-view of the polio-affected child whose world is limited to the few persons surrounding her. Like her creator (Bapsi Sidhwa), the protagonist is not sent to school and because of her interaction with the adults she learns to see life through their anxieties. The reality is incomprehensible; the forces operating at the particular phase of time are threatening.

Lenny is growing up during the turbulent period of the nation's history when the political parties are juggling with the idea of partition of India. Communal tension starts brewing slowly and even before partition, in March 1947 to be precise, it gave way to frenzied violence. Lenny feels apprehensive of the arson and massacre around her but what really cracks her faith in human goodness is the Ice-candy man's betrayal. Lenny's innocent "truth" becomes the Ayah's undoing, as in *The God of Small Things*; Estha's naïve "lie" becomes the cause of Velutha's death. In the former, the oppressor is the male representative of patriarchy, in the latter a female agent of the hegemony. The

ultimate result is the child-narrator's anguish—Lenny berates herself for her “truth-infected tongue” which by implication is her betrayal of Ayah. It is a period in the nation's history when life loses its stability; society loses its brotherhood; and the country, its character. She resents the sudden changes in the accepted pattern:

It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves—and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing Ayah—she is also a token. A Hindu (93).

In the vicious atmosphere of religious differences, the caste/class divide also gains prominence. Papoo, Moti-the-sweeper and his wife Muccho “became ever more untouchable as they are entrenched deeper in their low Hindu Caste” (93). The narrator sounds bitter in her remarks on the dehumanizing effect of “lofty caste and caste marks” (93) even on people like Nehru. Differences widen with every passing day and people are recognized and de-recognized by their religion and identified by their dress—Hari's dhoti, Ayah's sari, Imam Din's cap and Sher Singh's turban:

The Rogers of Birdwood Barracks, Queen Victoria and King George are English Christian: they look down their noses upon the Pens who are Anglo-Indian, who look down theirs on the Phailbuses who are Indian-Christian, who look down upon all non-Christians. Godmother, Slavesister, Electricaunt and my nuclear family are reduced to irrelevant nomenclatures—we are Parsee (94).

The child narrator asks a significant and innocent question— if everybody is his/her nomenclature, then “what is God?” Probably, to this question the elders have no answer. The venomous atmosphere of distrust seeps into individual psyche. The Queens Park, which was the hubbub of activities and a picture of gaiety and harmony, particularly during evenings when people converged to its open spaces for socializing, soon becomes a terrain of

divided loyalties. People are seen in their small religious groups, keeping away from those of other religions. And if and when acquaintances from different communities exchange views, they soon run out of patience and talk in derogatory terms, flinging insults at each other's traits. The Ice-candy man, the Masseur, the Mali and the Butcher soon come down to contemptuous utterances:

... aren't you Hindus expert at just this kind of thing? Twisting tails behind the scene... and getting someone else to slaughter your goat? (91)

....

'Oh dear, the poor Sikhs cannot live with Muslims if there is Pakistan.' (91)

....

'Haven't the Hindus connived with the *Angrez* to ignore the Muslim league, and support a party that didn't win a single seat in the Punjab? It's just the kind of thing we fear?' (92).

The only sane voice comes from the Ayah. She chides the men "if all you talk of nothing but this Hindu-Muslim business, I'll stop coming to the park" (92). That has a sobering effect and Ayah seems to be in control of the situation. Some readers of the novel see her as a symbol of communal harmony, though not because of her Hindu character but because of her feminine charm which Lenny is quick to intuit to.

In the given national scene, the most insecure are the Parsi of Pakistan. For them it is as much the question of survival as of identity. Bapsi Sidhwa admits in one of her interviews that as a Parsi in "a predominantly Muslims society" she felt marginalized (Sidhwa 2001: 1-10). However, her child-protagonist, too young to feel marginalized, does share the tensions and anxieties of the elders. She often overhears adult remarks, watches the mysterious happenings like appearance and disappearance of a huge box, and registers the warning signals expressed at the meetings of the Parsi community. Mr. Bankwalla's remarks, "Don't forget, we

are to run with the hounds and hunt with the hare” (37) suggest adjustment, while Colonel Bharucha’s thunderous voice warns of the partition of the land in three nations, “No one knows which way the wind will blow ... There may be not one but two—or even three—new nations! And the Parsees might find themselves championing the wrong side if they don’t look before they leap” (37). If the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs distrust each other, the Parsis are wary of all the three communities:

If we’re stuck with the Hindus they’ll swipe our business from under our noses and sell our grandfathers in the bargain; if we’re stuck with the Muslims they’ll convert us by the sword! And God help us if we’re stuck with the Sikhs! (37).

Arguably, the elders resist the present tension by recasting the past and reiterating the history of their first landing on Indian shores. They re-tell the story of their forefathers, the “smart and civilized people” who impressed the Indian Prince and got permission to live in his kingdom. This is a resistant gesture, which they evoke by distancing themselves from the particularity of present-day reality. Community solidarity nurtures in them emotional and psychological strength to resist the current social, political and religious threat. Invoking Ahura Mazda, they resolve to stay put in Pakistan and “abide by the rule of their land” (39). The decision to “cast their lot with whosoever rules Lahore” and to “move with the times,” is in consonance with the basic characteristic of the Parsis. In her interview with Julie Rajan, Sidhwa talks of the Paris trait to “adopt the flavor of whichever country we are in” and says that because “we are a people who have no land, so we have to adopt to whichever culture we find ourselves in” (Rajan 2001:1). It gives them security and also “a whole medley of identities.”

The history of the Parsis in India and concomitantly of Pakistan is the history of their efforts to preserve their identity; this became particularly important to them during the changing

historical setting of the partition. According to Jesse S. Palsetia, the Parsi attempt to preserve and safeguard their identity has fostered a strong sense of community:

A historical pattern of response emerges that favours adaptability to the social environment, while refashioning influences within social environment in support of the preservation, strengthening, and at times composition of a sense of group identity. In large measure, this entailed assimilation to the customs and ways of the social environment in both pre-colonial and colonial times. This shaped the Parsi identity into a unique amalgam of Indian and Western characteristics added to a conservative religious practice. At times, the assimilation to the social environment posed the risk of succumbing to its influences and trends.... At other times, the Parsis incorporated prevailing societal influences and trends as part of their identity as the active agents and pioneers of change (Palsetia 2001: 33).³

The ability of the community to foresee change, to accommodate themselves to the changing socio-political realities and the willingness to help the society is amply illustrated in *Ice-Candy Man*. The social welfare and rescue work for the victimized women during the partition holocaust undertaken fearlessly by Lenny's Godmother and mother is an example of their adapting practices. Particularly impressive is the Godmother's fascinatingly forceful handling of the Ice-candy man and the rescue of Ayah from his clutches.

The fearful realities of being "unhomed," to use Homi K. Bhabha's term, expressed through the insecurities of the community get transferred to Lenny. But since she cannot release her tension through articulation, as do the adults, they manifest in her nightmares. She dreams of being hewn to pieces in "businesslike" atmosphere, in the presence of her Godmother:

Godmother sits by my bed smiling indulgently as men in uniforms quietly slice off a child's arm here, a leg there. She strokes my head as they dismember me. I feel no pain. Only an abysmal sense of loss—and a chilling horror that no one is concerned by what's happening (22).

That “nobody is concerned” is a powerful ploy to indict those in authority and resist their callous apathy towards the fate of the powerless. At the personal level, Lenny sees her family, including her Godmother, as helpless; at the national level she loses faith in the leadership that is not concerned for the country and its citizens and is ready to hack the land to pieces. Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, Master Tara Singh and others signify rash, uncompromising and purblind leadership that harms the nation and disturbs its rhythm of life.

A nation is a cultural space representing certain events and happenings. At every point of time the image of the nation is altered. According to Homi K. Bhabha, the factors that contribute to the image are:

... the comfort of social being; the hidden injuries of class; the customs of taste, the powers of political affiliations; the blindness of bureaucracy; the strait insight of institutions; the quality of justice; the language of the low and the parole of people (Bhabha 1990:2).

But when the nation is in doldrums and in the grip of uncertainty, dogmatism and suspicion, the rhetoric extends to all sections of the society and the picture becomes gloomy. The novelist makes candid statements about the detrimental policies of the colonial powers and the divisive voices of the national leaders to deflate their vision that produces their negative dialectic. It is through social and moral censure of the negative system of authority that the author seeks to resist.

Bapsi Sidhwa vehemently calls into question the existing power structure, which is dragging the whole society towards disintegration by creating devastatingly divisive tendencies to the exclusion of finer human feelings as citizens of unified India. As theorists of history and historicity point out, societal and cultural models change in relation to collective resistance. Alan Touraine elaborates it thus: “society is not merely a system of norms or a system of domination; it is a system of social relations, of debates

and conflicts, of political initiatives and claims, of ideologies and alienations” (Touraine 1977: 30). During the time of ideological changes, society rethinks the dialectical relationships between ideas and power, past meanings and future utopias and creates itself anew. In India, the partition period and the resultant ideological changes endangered identity as well as survival crisis which contested the national homogeneity and dealt a serious setback to civic liberties and human rights.

Lenny acquires her knowledge of the chaotic realities of the historical situation from her unique positioning. Being more in the company of adults, and particularly of the servants, than a normal child, she imbibes adult views from two divergent groups: the Parsi community and the servants. The former express their concerns in refined and sophisticated manner but the latter are uncouth. Moreover, the Parsis, worried over the question of identity, are undecided whether to join India or stay in Pakistan, whereas people like the Ice-candy man, Sharbat Khan, the Masseur, the Mali, Sher Singh and a host of others construct the “us-them” paradigms to resist the power holders and create a complex subject–position for themselves; asserting their identities on religious basis, politicizing the definition of culture and ethnicity, challenging the established canons, showing irreverence towards both the colonizing power and nationalist leaders, and losing faith in their ideologies. Very soon, they distance themselves from their leaders and feel that the leaders’ struggle is no longer their struggle. Ayah voices this when she says: “what is it to us if Jinnah, Nehru and Patel fight? They are not fighting our fight” (75); to this Sher Singh adds, “but they are stirring trouble for us all” (76). Some of these views from the margins display their utter disregard, “Gandhi and Nehru are forcing the League to push for Pakistan” (63); “Gandhi, Nehru and Patel ... did not like the Muslim League’s victory in the Punjab elections” (90); “Gandhi ... is a politician. It’s his business to suit his tongue to the moment” (91). In fact, there

are umpteen derogatory references to Gandhi, “that non-violent, violence-monger;” Nehru, the sly one; Mountbatten “eating out of Nehru’s hand;” including Edwina and Nehru’s friendship.

Within these subversive remarks coming from the cross-section of the masses is located their resistance to partition as well as their nationalist construct for the new nation. To quote Touraine again, “Every popular class carries on an action that is defensive at the same time that is contestatory” (Touraine 1977: 302). These contradictory pulls recognize, on the one hand, the necessity to oppose the British together with the Congress and their Hindu leadership, and on the other, to seek separation and redefinition of Muslim identity. How the construction of a separate national identity becomes critically related to the leadership question can be illuminated from Sidhwa’s approach to the leaders. Gandhi, Nehru and others come under her scathing attack through Lenny (who picks up her views from the servants) but Jinnah a “first-rate lawyer” is assessed as a leader of high caliber. “Don’t under-estimate Jinnah ... He will stick within his rights, no matter whom Nehru feeds! He’s a first-rate lawyer and he knows how to attack the British with their own laws!” (131). The omniscient author, at one point, takes the narrative in her hands to glorify Jinnah, the “brilliant, elegantly handsome” man who won a “raving” Parsi beauty twenty-two years his junior. Not content with this, she even launches a tirade against India, to set right the picture:

And today, forty years later, in films of Gandhi and Mountbatten’s lives, in books by British and Indian scholars, Jinnah, who for a decade was known as ‘Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity’, is caricatured, and portrayed as a monster (160).

This leaves no doubt that Sidhwa “sees Partition from the Western side of the Indo-Pak border” (Zaman 1990: 171). She establishes her identity also by focusing on the inhuman atrocities committed on the Muslims in the Indian side of the Punjab, the particular point of reference being Pir Pindo and Ranna’s story told in all its harrowing details. Is it the author’s inherent Parsi trait to “be” with the ruling

power? Or does the contrast between the feelings conveyed by Lenny and glossed over by the author demarcate the boundary between a childhood sensitivity and an adult sensibility? Whatever it is, Sidhwa reiterates her stand in her later writings and interviews.⁴

However, coming back to the faithful recording of the public ire against the leaders marks the beginning of Lenny's mistrust of and resistance to imperialism and colonialism. Resistance to British imperialism and colonialism operates at many levels in the narrative. The dramatic confrontation between Inspector-General Rogers and Mr. Singh determines to an extent the nature of and spaces for domination and resistance. In his colonizer's arrogance, Rogers proclaims, "if we quit India today, old chap, you'll bloody fall at each others' throats" (62). Mr. Singh in his belligerence declaims, "We will have Swaraj" (61) and reiterates the "quit India" slogan. The challenge to politics, history, culture and the entire social structure comes as challenges to power. Fear of dislocation, not only from the social milieu but also from the social past of harmonious relations is subtly expressed in Lenny's innocent questions, her nightmares and her frustrated bouts of violence when she tears her doll's clothes, dismembers its limbs in rage and cries over the ravage. The concept of partition, which is expressed in local idiom as "breaking the country", bewilders the child. Her query, "can one break a country?" (92), is in a way a veiled attack on the absurdity of partition. Lenny feels threatened at the idea of "rivers of blood" flowing. "Will the earth bleed? And what about the saundered rivers? Won't their water drain into the jagged cracks? Not satisfied by breaking India, they now want to tear the Punjab" (116). Once the partition is finalized, Lenny is awe-struck at the inexorable historical process that seals her identity as a Pakistani, with one stroke of pen. "Playing British gods under the ceiling fans of the Falettis Hotel ... the Radcliff Commission deals out India like a pack of cards ... I am a Pakistani. In one snap" (140). The novel at this point becomes a clear and powerful discourse about resistance struggle. But paradoxically, as hegemonic power is fractured by the struggle of the subordinates, the struggle itself renders power contestatory, contributes to the disruption of harmonious social relations and produces more agendas of power.

While the thematic pattern emphasizes Lenny's political perspective, the sub-text of the novel ensures and represents

her awakening to her sexuality, and the pains and pleasures of growing up. Usually, our culture approaches childhood sexuality with either indifference or panic and discussions remain submerged within political and moral debates. But Bapsi Sidhwa resolutely lets Lenny glean the mysteries of sex through direct and indirect methods. While Rosy regales her with racy stories, and provides the female vision of sex, her cousin's childish but frank admiration of her beauty and his teenage fantasies about love and marriage make her conscious of a boy's view of feminine charm and the male longing for female body. Lenny admits frankly, he "shows me ME!" (220). On the other hand, Lenny witnesses Ayah's graces and glances, her encounters with her dozens of admirers, their amorous, suggestive and often lecherous actions, which arouse Lenny's femininity. Her body becomes a source of pleasure and possession as she notices its development; its contours send her into fantasies:

I look about me with new eyes. The world is athrob with men. As long as they have some pleasing attribute—height, width, or beauty of face—no man is too old to attract me. Or too young: tongawallahs, knife-sharpeners, shop-keepers, police men, school boys, Father's friends all exert their compelling pull on my runaway fantasies in which I am recurrently spirited away to remote Himalayan hide outs; to be worshipped, fought over, died for, importuned and wooed until, aroused to a passion that tingles from my scalp into the very tips of my fingers, I finally permit my lover to lay his hand upon my chest. It is no small bestowal of favour, for my chest is no longer flat. (219).

Lenny instinctively learns to guard her body from male gaze and from male touch. "I can't trust anyone," she says and admits how fatiguing it is to maintain her distance from the men, particularly her Cousin who is always mischievously looking for a chance to touch.

Lenny's subjective sensitivity to her sex is supplemented by the other socio-cultural aspects of woman's lived experiences and extend the meaning of knowledge beyond her limited purview:

her Godmother's power, Ayah's vulnerability, Papoo's helplessness and her own constricted life. Taking up Lenny's case first, we find that she is restricted primarily because of her handicap, not so much by patriarchal norms. Nilufer Bharucha examines Lenny's enclosed life and opines that since Zoroastrianism does not have the concept of *Purdah* or female segregation into *Zenana* or *Andar Mahal*, "the female subordination for Parsi women has societal force;" it is not "sanctioned by scriptural authority" (Bharucha 2001:100). Bharucha, however, agrees that the Parsi religion has "severe restrictions on the movement of women especially from the view of rituals to the notions of purity and defilement" (Bharucha 2001:100). But living in a predominantly Muslim society/country, and following its tenets to an extent, the Parsi women do feel restricted. Sidhwa records in her interview with Julie Rajan that she felt free in Bombay after her first marriage, and now in the U.S.A. she loves and relishes her freedom (Rajan 2001). Since Lenny is not constricted in the enclosures devised by male hegemonic culture, she enjoys space and freedom to gather knowledge of the existing political, social and religious conditions. Papoo, approximately her age, forms a telling contrast to her because of her (Papoo's) gender as well as her caste/class. Lenny shudders to think of the "grotesque possibilities" awaiting Papoo" (187) after her marriage to the ugly, insolent, middle-aged Tota Ram, who audaciously scrutinizes women with "assertive, assessing directness" even on his wedding day. Whatever the nationalist leaders might say about women's liberation, the society clamps its rules/norms on them and the doubly subaltern have no voice. It is an inert, dumb and almost lifeless Papoo who is dragged to her marriage altar by the coaxing and cunning parents.

Belonging to the aware and forward-looking Parsi community has been an advantage for Lenny's Godmother and mother. It empowers them. They both work for the cause of the victimized women. The Godmother in particular exudes

power: the power of a woman “to move mountains” or “erect mountainous barriers” where she resists; the power of feminine knowledge of random, commonplace under-currents of life, of the knowledge of “ancient lore and wisdom and herbal remedy,” and the power to help, soothe and console. Lenny feels her power and its impact; “you cannot be near her without feeling her uncanny strength” (211). As against this, stands the sexual power of attraction of Ayah. It becomes Ayah’s undoing at the crucial juncture of religious frenzy. Kidnapped, raped and pushed onto the *Kotha*, Ayah’s fate is one with scores of other women who suffered during the holocaust of the partition irrespective of religious affinities. The men Ayah banked upon once are the ones to deceive her, the main culprit being the Ice-candy man. Despite his protestations of love for Ayah, Lenny sees him as unreliable. “Tracherous, dangerous, contemptible. A destructive force that must be annihilated” (249). Lenny is shattered to see Ayah drained of life, haunted by her past and apprehensive of her future. With Godmother’s efforts Ayah is restored to her family in Amritsar but how she would cope with the scar of being a “fallen woman” accounts for much of unsettling psychic displacement of the victims. It is a question better left to conjecture. Lenny’s new Ayah Hamida and a whole lot of wailing women whom Hamida calls “fate smitten” and “*Kath-putli* in the hands of fate” (213-15) are also the victims of communal violence. That the centrality of communalism, operating within the patriarchal structure of power, should be the woman’s body speaks of woman’s vulnerability and is part of feminist concerns and debates. The penitent Ice-candy man’s quixotic quest across the Wagah border stresses the resistant structure of the novel. Resistance is reinforced in Ayah spurning the Ice-candy man as also in the portrayal of womanhood, which despite being the tragic victim is redeemed from the horrors of sin. Ayah becomes the subject of the Ice-candy man’s tenacious longing that she ignores. Ironically, in his display of consummate passion, the

Ice-candy man looks spineless whereas in her resistance, she looks strong. It cannot, however, be overlooked that it is a man's world and on the political stage, sex and gender exert powerful direction over actions, particularly during the cataclysmic time.

In fact, the illogicality of the concept of purity of women and the vulnerability of nation's women is always a burning issue at times such as these. Ayah, Hamida and others are the cataclysm of the patriarchal ideology of revenge. Violation of the "Other's" women signifies an attack on the masculinity of their community. As Kamla Visweswaran points out, woman is "the symbol of violence as the shame and subjection of her community is represented by her" (qtd in Jayawardena 1996: xviii). Thus, the mind and the body of the colonized woman becomes the site of rape and in political discourse the rape of woman is interpreted not so much as an outrage against womanhood but as an assault on the manhood of the community. In that case, man is rendered the victim while woman is represented as an object of national disgrace. Lenny's Ayah is just a microcosm of the macro events taking place all over India and the newly created Pakistan (East and West both). In the fictional version, Ayah and Hamida are lucky to be saved from the degradation of leading life as prostitutes, but in real life situations, resistance to the recovery process came from the families of the abducted women, as also from the women themselves who knew their status could not be determined in their families. These women in the Penitentiary knew that protest would be futile and that they would regret it later. Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin in their account of the recovery operation in post-partition India record the painful uncertainties faced by both Hindu and Muslim women who called themselves "permanent refugees" and "refused to return to their homes, preferring the anonymity and relative autonomy of the ashram to a now alien family"⁵ (Menon and Bhasin 1996:16).

Located simultaneously at the center of the flux of history and its periphery, Lenny is exposed to the enigma of human suffering

and human relationships; she learns to watch the events from a child's sensitivity and record them with adult perception. As she struggles to grapple with reality, the "burden of history" (Desai 2001:1) falls on her shoulders, and amid the interplay of the power game and the politics of resistance, Lenny weeps for her loss—loss of innocence and of her childhood Eden that would never be resurrected. Lenny's horror of her "truth-infected tongue" and the adult capacity to deceive is soon supplemented by adult trickery that leads Estha and Rahel into falsehood in *The God of Small Things* and damages their psyche permanently.

III

Unlike Bapsi Sidhwa's novel which is set at the intersection of history, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is situated in the India of 1960s, but the socio-political realities are as corroding as ever, and though not identical, they are not different either: only the colonial masters are replaced by the neo-colonial forces, and the religious frenzy is substituted by the more intense, individualized, caste-oriented undercurrents of hatred and revenge. The colonization of the mind shapes the hegemonic standards and makes the community complicit in the oppression of its own people. Both novels interrogate and invite the adults to take responsibility for the demise of childhood. As Lenny shudders at "the pitiless face of love" (Sidhwa: 252), and Rahel, at the dance "designed" by biology and "timed by terror" (Roy 1997: 335), they are initiated into adult parameters of "truth" and "falsehood" and into "knowledge". Roy resituates her narration within the discourse of class, caste, gender and local politics to demonstrate oppression of "small gods" by the "big gods"—of the "Untouchable" by the "Touchable," of the women by men, and women by women, of children by the adults; in fact, of innocence by experience and of the uninitiated by the initiated. From the midst of the dominant culture, Roy raises

a speaking platform that allows her protagonist to look at life in retrospect, create a cultural space for herself and articulate from that space to be heard. If Estha does not have a voice, his dizygotic twin Rahel has. She, who is empowered by nature to think his thought and dreams his dreams, is also empowered by the author to “re-write” history/her story and to rebel against the system that victimizes and destroys.

Roy devices a unique narrative strategy to tell the story of childhood pains. She challenges the hegemonic essentialism by displacing the category of gender, and builds a structure that defies easy classification. It is a multi-layered narrative with complex use of points of view: a girl-child’s perception of childhood, supplemented with the memory of both Estha (a male) and Rahel (a female), is recounted from the vantage point of third person perspective. Rahel, in her thirties, returns home to Ayemenem, looks back at her childhood when she and Estha were just seven, and re-creates the past. The dynamic interplay between fiction and autobiography, fantasy and reality, history and politics, time and memory, past and present, and the innovative use of language and the stream-of-consciousness technique help to disrupt the conventional structure and give impetus to subversive politics. In that Arundhati Roy creates what Virginia Woolf terms “the psychological sentence of the feminine gender,” and what Dorothy Richardson calls, “a feminine equivalent of the... masculine realism.”⁶ From one angle, the novel becomes a typical feminist narrative pointing towards the emergence of “a woman’s aesthetic,” to use the term of Pam Morris;⁷ and it confirms Caroline Burke’s assertion that a woman’s writing should be “plural, autoerotic, diffuse, and indefinable within the familiar rules of [masculine] logic” (Burke 1981: 289). But then, there is another significant point to be considered: the novel cannot be slotted as a feminist text only on this basis. In its innovative use of fictional technique, it compares well with Rushdie’s singular style in *Midnight’s Children*⁸. Again, comparison does not aim at

negating Arundhati Roy's deftness in handling her technique on her own terms. Roy, too, resents being "lumped" with Rushdie and contends that every Indian writer has his/her form of writing and that it is unfair to evolve comparisons. Indian novelists have "a sense of complexity" because of the unique complexity of our country⁹, and every work is a product of it.

The God of Small Things defines some new textual and structural parameters and scrutinizes gender politics and cultural hegemonic ideologies of oppression that destroy innocence and silence the subaltern. Velutha and Ammu are destroyed and silenced forever for breaking "love Laws;" Estha and Rahel are ruined psychologically when:

"Childhood tiptoed out. Silence slid like a bolt" (320).

For Estha speech loses its meaning and for Rahel life is drained off its directional power; Estha is muted, Rahel turns a rebel, and the work becomes "a great protest novel, radical and subversive,... attacking several holy cows" (Rao 1997: 13). At the thematic and personal levels, the characters resist the oppressive social order in their search for freedom; at the textual level the narrative contests facile ordering of events; and by the end of the novel, the reader resists the self-justificatory and reactive tone of the story.

Rahel has much to be angry about. She has seen and experienced repeated humiliations when Mammachi spits on Velutha's face, the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man sodomizes Estha, Inspector Thomas Mathew calls Ammu *Veshya* and staring at her breasts, taps them with his baton. "Gently. *Tip, tap*. As though he was choosing mangoes" (8); and Baby Kochamma tricks them into falsehood. The entire atmosphere of Ayemenem house is one of distrust, rift and oppression. The backdrop of Kerala, God's own country, with its soothing natural beauty and the smooth-flowing Meenachal river is vitiated with the undercurrents of class/caste/gender divide and the absence of loving, doting elders who could make the twins feel "wanted", and give

them the feeling of belonging. This situation can well be contrasted with Lenny's situation in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*. Though Lenny is traumatized by the historical happenings, she has the loving support of some strong women around her—her powerful and doting Godmother, her understanding mother; and the tender and caring Ayah who is later replaced by Hamida, an equally loving figure. Even the men like the Ice-candy man, Imam Din and others are not wicked. Lenny is disturbed by the passion of the Ice-candy man but she learns to look at him as human. The spring of love and the sexuality sprouting in her is not dried. On the contrary, Roy's representation of the culture and community produces a profound critique of India a little more than a decade after the Independence and the narrative becomes an irredeemably pathological version of normal, healthy relations. Consequently Estha and Rahel remain as fragmented as the narrative.

The fragmented narrative poses the problem of reading the novel from the linear, chronological order. The dominant motifs of victimization, revolt, nemesis and the subsequent loss perpetuate their own myths while the socio-cultural forces throw into flux the ambivalences created by the dominant power's repeated oppressive tactics. So, when Rahel looks back at her past, the elements of patriarchal ideology that construct the norms and values of respectability fill her with revolt. She resists and contradicts the mores that the maneuvering of history and culture generate. She wonders at the selective nature of nemesis. There were many transgressors and transgressions in their family but only a few suffered:

Perhaps, Ammu, Estha and she were the worst transgressors. But it wasn't just them. It was the others too. They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. The laws that make grandmothers grandmothers, uncle uncles, mothers mothers, cousins cousins, jam jam, and jelly jelly (31).

Uncle Chako and Margaret, his English wife, Baby Kochamma and Father Mulligan affair, uncle Chako and the women of his pickle factory and many more are the transgressions but they are all exonerated. The punishing septre falls on Ammu, her twins and Velutha: on Ammu for transgressing first the community norms by marrying a Bengali-Hindu and then for crossing the caste/class rules, and on Estha and Rahel for their mother's sins. Arundhati Roy's deep investment in and inside knowledge of her native Keralite culture and the Syrian Christian world view helped her produce a work challenging the intrinsic worth of the discriminatory laws, rules, regulation, customs and norms. The figures that emerge from her historical, cultural and social revolt are the twins whom a critic calls "the survivor of family oppression" (Sarbadhikary 2000:154). But on close reading, one wonders if they could justifiably called "survivors" in their dead-alive existence!

Childhood is a vulnerable period and once a child loses the vital "self" during his/her journey from childhood to adulthood, it is well-nigh impossible get back the healthy grip on life. An anonymous letter published in a journal of psychoanalysis points out that a child undergoes traumatic experience if he/she is made to feel rejected or uncared for, which results in psychic death. It is an esoteric process but it arrests his/her growth into a wholesome personality. The letter sums up the position thus:

How is it possible to lose a self? The treachery, unknown and unthinkable begins with our secret psychic death in childhood—if and when we are not loved and are cut off from our spontaneous wishes... Everything looks normal; no crime was intended; there is no corps, no guilt. All we can see is the sun rising and setting as usual. But what has happened? He has been rejected, not only by them, but by himself... What has he lost? Just one true and vital part of himself: his own yes-feeling, which is his very capacity for growth, his root system (Anonymous 1949: 3).

This is exactly what Estha and Rahel encounter—rejection; and the consequent loss of that vital part of themselves which could authenticate their “Being”. The most damaging signals come from Baby Kochamma and Uncle Chako. While Chako makes it clear to Estha and Rahel that their mother has no “Locusts Stand I” (57) and concomitantly her children have no place in the family, Baby Kochamma makes no secret of her antagonism:

She subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parent’s home. As for a *divorced* daughter—according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a *divorced* daughter from a *love* marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma’s outrage. As for a *divorced* daughter from a (sic) *intercommunity love* marriage—Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject (46).

The hurt of rejection, painful by itself becomes damaging when even Kochu Maria, the “vinegar-hearted” cook speaks the masters’ language and grabs every opportunity to belittle them and convey that they were living on charity in Ayemenem house. “Tell your mother to take you to your father’s house ... There you can break as many beds as you like. These aren’t your beds. This isn’t *your* house” (83). Thus, the world of the novel, with its images of rejection, spite and contempt, is an unhealthy, ossified world that is perniciously destructive to healthy human growth.

In addition, the twins experience adult partiality after Sophie Mol’s arrival from England with Margaret Kochamma—Chako’s divorced English wife. Sophie Mol is almost made into a VIP with everybody dotting on her and celebrating her home-coming with Cakes and welcome songs accompanied by Mammachi’s violin performance. Even Baby Kochamma sheds her cynicism for a while. Sophie’s status as a divorced couple’s daughter, a hybrid child, becomes a non-issue because she is the son’s daughter. Thus in a society where gender discrimination is rampant, be it the aware and educated Syrian Christian community of a state like

Kerala, such precepts of gender and sexuality are understood to represent the “natural” order and are equated with cultural authenticity. Here, it is comparable with Mrinal Pande’s *Daughter’s Daughter* wherein the child-narrator Devi, (also seven year old) realizes and resents the “othering” of a daughter’s daughter in her maternal grandmother’s home. But Devi and her siblings have a father and a home to return to; Rahel and Estha are “homeless” from that angle. Feeling unloved and isolated, the twins react each according to his/her individual psyche—becoming defiant or stubborn in a childish way that makes their mother uneasy. A strict disciplinarian, she wants her children not to fail in the ritualistic behavioral pattern, to show immaculate breeding so as not attract unkind and uncharitable remarks. And yet Baby Kochamma misses no opportunity to surmise that they are indisciplined and unruly children. “They’re sly. They’re uncouth. Deceitful. They are growing wild. You can’t manage them” (149). Every word she utters emits her hatred for the “Hindu-hybrid” twins who are a disgrace to their self-respecting Syrian Christian community.

And so, when Rahel looks back at her childhood she does it not with “despair” but with “a sort of enforced optimism” (19), an optimism that is poised on the brink of vengeance and rage; an optimism born out of the knowledge that nothing mattered now because “Worst Things had happened.” Between the interplay of the Big God and the Small God, the small god has come away “cauterized” and

Inured by the confirmation of his inconsequence he became resilient and truly indifferent. Nothing mattered much. Nothing much mattered. And the less it mattered, the less it mattered. It was never important enough (19).

On her return to Ayemenem after twenty-three years, Rahel deliberately meets Comrade Pillai to shock him by telling him non-chalantly that she is “divorced.” By repeating Ammu’s

history/her story, Rahel not only ascertains her defying power but also re-enacts “History in live performance” (30). Rahel/Roy is now empowered to write an account of a lived reality; she is ready to write woman’s history to show what life means for a woman (and for a subaltern) under the hegemonic order. In her act of framing a tradition, she creates what feminist literary critics term “creating themselves as a category: women” (Mitchell qtd in Eagleton 1986: 89)¹⁰ and subverts the symbolic order. The tussle is between those who have history, value system and the entire culture on their side and those who are deprived, those who can “howl” and those who have no voice. Here Gayatri Spivak’s much-quoted and path breaking question “Can the subaltern speak?” becomes relevant. Spivak, in asking this seminal question critiques the reality of the subaltern woman’s racial and gender identities that reinforce her silence. In the space of *The God of Small Things*, Ammu is both doubly subaltern and hence doubly marginalized by virtue of her gender and her dubious position as the divorced wife of a Bengali-Hindu. The iron hand of tradition forestalls her struggle to claim an independent subjectivity and the agents of the dominant ideology—Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Chako, in the family, and Comerade Pillai and Inspector Thomas Mathew as representatives of the community—make it clear that she has no right to have a voice, that she cannot be a speaking subject and that it is sacrilegious to have female desire. Mammachi’s indifference, Baby Kochamma’s direct involvement in destroying her and Chako’s male chauvinistic assertion of proprietorial rights of Ayemenem House, “What’s Yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine” (57) provide a glimpse of the commodification of women. But neither Ammu nor Rahel/Roy can be muted. The rebellious streak in them is too strong to be suppressed; even at their own peril they defy.

Ammu, the central character of the novel has the potential to be defiant, insubordinate, rebellious and rash. She resists

Chako, Mammachi and even the formidable Baby Koachmma. She is capable of slamming the door and walking away, which she often does, leaving “everybody to wonder where she had learnt her effrontry from” (180). She has once walked out of her married home and she could walk out of Ayemenem house but for the children who are the “millstones around [her] neck” (253), preventing her freedom. After she is detected with Velutha and is locked up, the helpless Ammu screams at her innocent children, “If it wasn’t for you I wouldn’t be here! None of this would have happened. I wouldn’t be here! I would have been free!” (253). Granted, as feminists would agree, that a woman’s demand for freedom is a genuine demand, but the question still remains—free to do what? Behind Ammu’s first decision to break her marriage, there was a principle; what ideology is there now in her clamor to be “free”?

Arguably, here the issue of her affair with Velutha is not to be judged on the basis of caste/class; nor is it important to debate presence of the man-made divide of caste/class in the egalitarian Marxist regime. The problematic here concerns the immediate repercussions on the children. The same Ammu who calls her children “millstones” around her neck because they are a hindrance to her freedom, is terrified after a couple of years “of what adult thing her daughter might say and thaw Frozen Time” (161). Rahel does not ask her any uncomfortable questions but she feels repulsed by Ammu’s very presence. At school, she defies all authority and in a way re-enacts her mother’s rebelliousness, breaks the school rules and asserts her freedom to do what she *wishes* to do but what she *ought* not to do. She first gets a warning, then is blacklisted and then expelled thrice from school:

Rahel was first blacklisted in Nazareth convent at the age of eleven, when she was caught outside her Housemistress’s garden gate decorating a knob of fresh cowdung with small flowers. At Assembly the next morning she was made to look up *depravity* in the Oxford Dictionary and read aloud its meaning: ‘*The quality or condition of*

being depraved or corrupt. Rahel read, with a row of stern-mouthed nuns seated behind her and a sea of sniggering schoolgirl faces in front. ‘*Perverved quality...*’ (16).

Six months later she was expelled after repeated complaints from senior girls that she deliberately collided with them; she did this, she admitted, to find out if breasts hurt. The nuns were horrified as it was beyond all polite limits to talk of the body. Second time she was expelled for smoking and third time for stealing and then setting fire to her Housemistress’s false hair bun (16-17). More than Ammu’s potential for defiance, Rahel’s open rebellion provides the resistant structure to the novel, because it is her memory that gives meaning to its intention.

The narrative’s intention does not seem to draw parallels between the mother’s and the daughter’s situations, or to write a feminist text. Nor is it just a cry against the discriminatory practices and oppressive tactics of the society. As Roy specifies in one of her interviews, her novel is not about “our culture,” it is about human nature and “not really about what happened, but about how what happened affected the people that it happened to” (Abraham 2001: 90). The novel thus becomes an indictment of a situation in which oppression is a way of life; it questions the role societal forces play in creating that situation and problematizes the dialectic of owning responsibility for the result of that situation. The centre of the novel, as Roy states in her Salon Internet interview, “is everyone, Ammu, Baby Kochamma, Velutha, Estha, Rahel—they all are the core” (Salon interview 2001: 1-7). Thus, the onus for Ammu’s destruction, Rahel’s drifting and Estha’s amnesia and loss of voice lies not just with their family, but also with the entire community and by implication with the culture.

In fact, the whole community is involved, in one way or the other, directly or indirectly, in building up the explosive situation that ultimately ruins Estha and Rahel. If Ammu has the “mulish streak” in her character, it is because she is the product

of a home where she has learnt the inverted version of the Father Bear Mother Bear tale in which the Mother Bear was beaten by a monstrous Father Bear with brass vases, and “Mother Bear suffered those beatings with mute resignation” (180). Her father Benaam John Ipe (Pappachi), an esteemed Entomologist working with the prestigious Pusa Institute, brutalized and terrorized his wife and defenceless little daughter Ammu. Outside the home, he was the charming and urbane man who “fawned” on his visitors if they happened to be “white,” donated lavishly to orphanages and leprosy homes, and created a public image as a “sophisticated, generous, moral man.” The same Pappachi was a “monstrous, suspicious bully” at home, with “a streak of vicious cunning.” He beat them, humiliated them and “then made them suffer the envy of friends and relations for having such a wonderful father” (180). Ammu learned to live “with this cold, calculating cruelty,” developed a sense of injustice and the “mulish, reckless streak” of Someone Small bullied by “Someone Big” (181-2). Pappachi stopped beating his wife after Chako, back from Oxford saw the scene and twisting his father’s arm warned him, “I never want this to happen again... Ever” (48). This brought a turning point in Mammachi’s life: Pappachi found sly ways to torture her like smashing her violin and killing her artistic urge, stopping all communication with her and feigning that his wife neglected him; on the other hand, Mammachi was so overwhelmed by Chako’s supremacy that she transferred all her affection to him which Chako, recognizing as her weakness, exploited to his advantage.

This situation calls to mind two similar situations—one in *The Thousand Faces of Night* and another in *A Matter of Time*. In the former, Sita’s father-in-law objects to her *Veena* and music. In rage, Sita breaks her *Veena* and kills her art but almost two decades later she revives it and retrieves her “self”. In the latter, Kalyani’s husband stops all communication with his wife to punish her. But Kalyani endures life as it comes and suffers

in dignity, which speaks of her strength. Compared with these two figures, Mammachi is passive. She lacks the strength Sita and Kalyani (in the above two novels) display. Probably, it is Rahel's portrayal of her grandmother toward whom she displays scant tenderness that Mammachi remains a pathetic figure, unimpressive even when as the ruling matriarch of Ayemenem House. But Mammachi, like her sister-in-law Baby Kochamma is not without her share of spite. She detests Chako's wife Margaret—"Shopkeeper's daughter"—was how Margaret Kochamma was filed away in Mammachi's mind" (167). Mammachi, in her turn, is sly enough to camouflage her contempt behind the façade of her welcoming strategies—cake and violin—to keep Chako happy. Her maternal love for Chako is nearly obsessive and since the day Chako had stopped her beatings "Mammachi packed her wifely luggage and committed it to Chako's care. From then onwards he became the repository of all her womanly feelings. Her Man. Her only Love" (168). As an agent of patriarchy, Mammachi practices society's double standards. Her treatment of Ammu and the kids stands in sharp contrast to her attitude towards Chako and his family. Mammachi condones Chako's sexual laxity and relations with "low caste" women as "Men's Needs," but Ammu's need is analogous to "dog and bitch" heat. Roy's powerful depiction of Mammachi's reaction to Ammu-Velutha-affair is so aptly worded that a reader can both share her worry, agreeing with her and yet despise her for her colonial stance in which coupling with a "filthy Coolie" tantamount to defiling "generations of breeding" (257-58).

Despite Mammachi's erstwhile suffering and her righteous anger and concern for her family name, neither Rahel nor Ammu (and for that matter not even the implied author) can redeem her. She remains on the periphery. Between them, her parents—her weak mother and tyrant father—gave Ammu an environment that added to her misery. What with occasional lashings, Pappachi stopped her education, believing higher edu-

cation was bad for girls, thus rendering her unequipped to face her future, while he sent Chako to Oxford, and condoned all his lapses and vagaries. This accounts for Ammu's temperamental inconsistencies, her "infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber" (44). So restrictive and suffocating was the atmosphere of her home that Ammu grabbed the first man, a Bengali-Hindu she met in Calcutta and hurried into a marriage that gave her nothing but further tensions and insecurities. Ammu returned to Ayemenem, divorced, frustrated and encumbered with the twins, exposed to family discomfiture, community's questioning gaze and Baby Kochamma's ire.

In the unwholesome atmosphere of Ayemenem House, the twins have only Ammu and from outside the family circle, Velutha. Velutha's love is a man's love—robust, playful and adventurous. For them, it is an unconscious substitute for father love. He designs wooden toys for them, repairs the boat, takes them for fishing, rows them across Meenachal to the History House which becomes an expedition of exploration of sorts; moreover, he participates in their games, enjoying their fiction, feigning it is real. The caste barrier does not mean anything to the children. Probably, they find in him a kindred soul, polluted like them. However, a significant question looms large here. Would the children accept him as a substitute for their absent father? Would they accept him as Ammu's lover? If no, then what is Ammu gaining by this unacceptable liaison? Satisfaction of her carnal desires? Or just expressing her "suicide bomber's" rage? And then, how could Ammu be so naive as to think that her nocturnal trysts with the Paravan would remain a secret forever? How could Ammu, always careful to protect the children, expose them for her personal gratification?

Ammu loved her children (of course), but their wide-eyed vulnerability and their willingness to love people who didn't really love them, exasperated her and sometimes made her want to hurt them—just as an education, a protection (43).

Unfortunately, it is Ammu's misplaced passion that hurts the children and destroys their childhood. Ultimately, what was the price she paid for her freedom? "Two lives. Two children's childhoods. And a history lesson for future offenders" (336). Critics tend to glorify Ammu-Velutha affair; in their parting word "Tomorrow" they see the prospect of future hope; and in their union they discern the triumph of love: of the Small God over the Big God and his value system. But here, one has to pause to distinguish between love and lust, between rebellion and its efficacy. Also, one must watch the flow of the narrative and catch its tone because in the contemporary scenario that a critic calls a culture of "unimaginable immediacy—a culture of 'instant' heroes, 'instant' tragedy, 'instant' record-breaking, 'instant' classics," it is necessary to give a sensitive cultural reading to fiction of global dependence. Any study of contemporary fiction, particularly in its neo-colonial context, must interpret the present in the light of the past, "the images of today" need to be interpreted to ascertain the way they reflect a submerged history (Brennan 1990:67). Perhaps, this explains the persistent presence of unease about Velutha.

The author/Rahel paints Velutha almost as a demi-god—handsome in his dark, shining skin, able and artistic, healthy and cheerful, resourceful and hardworking, and above all good-natured and loving. And precisely because of these qualities there is an undercurrent of tension and apprehension in society. He has self-assurance about him that puts others, including Comrade Pillai and Velutha's father, on their guard: "Perhaps it was just lack of hesitation. An unwarranted assurance. In the way he walked. The way he held his head. The quiet way he offered suggestions without being asked. Or the quiet way in which he disregarded suggestions without appearing to rebel" (76). The society hates these qualities that are "unparavan-like". The low-castes are supposed to be submissive and since Velutha transgresses the rule, the society finds an opportunity to punish him

and set an example for future history. Mammachi's observations echo the community's view of the whole incident:

Mammachi's rage at the old one-eyed Paravan standing in the rain, drunk, dribbling and covered in mud was redirected into a cold contempt for her daughter and what she had done. She thought of her naked, coupling in mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy *coolie*... The sound of their breathing. His particular Paravan smell. *Like animals*. Mamachi thought and nearly vomited. *Like a dog and bitch on heat*... she had defiled generations of breeding and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, *forever* now, people would point at them at weddings and funerals. At baptisms and birthday parties. They'd nudge and whisper. It was all finished now (257-58).

Rahel is too young to think in terms of the social stigma but Velutha hovers like an unrelenting, unspecified feeling of discomfort in her memory, which results in the touch of ambivalence in her portrayal. Rahel has nothing against Velutha; as their adult companion she liked him. Likewise, she does not proclaim her dissent openly for his relations with Ammu. From where then comes a kind of distance in her attitude to him, in her reminiscences of his end? The way he is implicated, beaten and killed is tragic but somehow Rahel depicts Velutha's death as pathetic; it evokes righteous anger and pity at human level, but it falls short of being a tragedy. The man Velutha, the lover Velutha, gets dissolved in the narrator's "brittle" anger and flip-pant tone. In the beginning of the novel, she talks of the bigger despair in which smaller "*personal* despair" is lost: "personal turmoil dropped by at the wayside shrine of the vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible, public turmoil of a nation" (19). In the bigger and larger scenario of the entire society where people still suffer oppression, where does Velutha's story stand?

Yet, it is the personal turmoil in their mother's life that Rahel is concerned with throughout the narrative. Rahel resists the "Unsafe Edges" to her mother's personality because these give

her the “air of unpredictability” (44). Child Rahel looking at her mother is certainly different from adolescent Rahel who is repulsed by Ammu; conversely, adult Rahel reconstructing her long-dead mother is different from both—the child and adolescent Rahel. She can now identify with her mother. Her portrayal of her mother undergoes changes as the story advances. Rahel’s memory and the author’s vantage position as an omniscient presence leave no secrets to be hidden: Ammu is ripped open inside out and so is Baby Kochamma and in fact all the others.

Ammu is tender and loving but stern; strong but weak; independent minded yet slave to her desire. While looking at her mother in retrospect, Rahel sees her own relationship with her as vacillating between tender understanding and revulsion, anger and indifference, love and hate. Paradoxically, even when angry, Rahel cannot indict Ammu, even when sorry for her, she cannot pity her, and despite her tenderness, she cannot nurture her. Ammu-Rahel relationship does not reach the stage of nurturance because of Ammu’s early death, at thirty-one, “Not old. Not young. But a viable die-able age” (327). But Rahel remembers how Ammu made persistent and constant demands on the twins by reiterating that Ammu loves them as nobody else does, and so they must be “ideal” children for her sake. This puts enormous pressure on the children. A mother demanding obedience and discipline from her children is natural and socially relevant; problem arises when Ammu gives them the wrong signal that her love depended upon their immaculate behaviour and that she could stop loving them were they to disobey her. Under such threats a child remains under constant stress to live up to the standard and fails to establish contact with his/her inner ‘Being’. What Ammu wants is “smooth performance. A prize for her children in the Indo-British Behaviour Competition” (145). One cannot miss the sarcasm here. In her satirical tone lies Rahel’s resistance to her mother’s pressurizing tactics.

On one occasion when the twins become adamant in their childish way, Ammu upbraids them. The focal point of her demand is her “double love” for them.

“Everybody says that children need a Baba. And I say no. Not *my* children. D’you know why?”

Two heads nodded.

“Why tell me,” Ammu said.

And not together, but almost, Esthappen and Rahel said, “Because you’re our Ammu and our Baba and you love us Double”.

“More than Double,” Ammu said. “So remember what I told you. People’s feelings are precious. And when you disobey me in Public, everybody gets the wrong impression” (149).

Ammu’s conditional love becomes a trap. It generates insecurities. As children they are prone to mistakes. There are so many small lapses intentional or unintentional that blow into big tensions for the twins. They feel scared when they do not perform well in class, not because mother will scold them but because she will “love them less”. In order to retain her love, they must perform well; have good handwriting; immaculate record and so on. Particularly foreboding is the Orangedrink man incident in Abhilash Talkies that hammers in their heads the “sadness of Ammu’s loving [them] less” (115). Ammu projects herself to her children as an all-loving presence, a sophisticated, anglicized woman who would not harbour any “native” nonsense like blowing spit bubbles. “Ammu hated them blowing spit-bubbles. She said it reminded her of Baba.... According to Ammu only clerks behaved like that, not aristocrats” (84). One wonders, as one reads on, what will happen to “aristocratic” Ammu’s muted sense of superiority, her standards of do’s and don’t’s as and when the children discover her false move? Ultimately, the image breaks, their mother falls from grace and with the fall their paradise is shattered. With the fragmented narrative running wild like Rahel’s memory, it is difficult to tell, however, what affected

the children most—Ammu's fall, Velutha's death or their own lie abetted by Baby Kochamma's treachery.

It is easier for Rahel to accept an angry mother than a broken mother. After Ammu's return from the town where she is employed, Rahel, now almost eleven is repulsed to see her physically and psychologically shattered. She looks "Wild. Sick. Sad" (159). Jobless and ailing, she clings to Rahel, talks to her incessantly. Her Asthma rattles in her chest and she retches. It is then that Rahel resists her; ignoring her "she went on with her fish. She thought of the phlegm and nearly retched. She hated her mother then. *Hated* her" (161). Fortunately for him, Estha never saw Ammu suffer like this, still Estha berates himself: "it was *his* fault that the faraway man in Ammu's chest stopped shouting. *His* fault that she died alone in the lodge with no one to lie at the back of her and talk to her" (325). Self-berating, feeling guilty and confused with life's strange course, Estha becomes forlorn and distant, cultivating isolation within his mind. He is muted and he slides into amnesia only to be awakened by Rahel's arrival.

Adult Rhael tries to come to grips with her mother's side of the story. She/Roy makes sense of Ammu's sexuality and her hidden desire. The days when her "walk changed from a safe mother-walk to another wilder sort of walk" she seems to be in a kind of liquid ache spread under her skin (44). She becomes extra vigilant about her body's contours and finally she reaches out to Velutha. The narrator describes the scenes with deft touches and creates a romantic atmosphere that most critics liken to scenes from romantic box-office films and lament the damage it does to the structural unity and artistic fabric of the novel. Rahel probably witnessed some of her mother's forbidden actions, or may be quick, observant, active and vigilant as she was, she could have guessed and imagined them. When Rahel awakens to sexuality, it is not with tender admiration but with mischievous carelessness, and adventurous recklessness. Sexuality does not bring magic in its wake as it does in Lenny's case, but

rebellion. Rahel resists the knowledge with her perverted exploration of the body, gets expelled, and after much drifting finds her way to marriage. Her incomprehensible ways exasperate her husband; she gets a divorce and comes to Ayemenem to shock the community by breaking their laws. She feels secure in the knowledge that since she has shattered all norms, the society has nothing to take away from her. She is certainly an advance over Mammachi and Ammu.

The novel looks beyond the narrow limits of feminism or institutionalized practices of oppression in resisting the overall effect of oppressive structures on human beings both the actors/perpetrators and those acted upon/victimized. A telling example is of Baby Kochamma, the senile, cynic aunt of Ammu who becomes both the victim and victimizer. Rahel reconstructs her grandaunt Navomi Ipe alias Baby Kochamma through her personal history. The unfairness of Baby Kochamma's remarks and the viciousness of her behaviour reflect on her damaged self-esteem. A survivor of patriarchy, she reacts with venomous intensity to all those who seek happiness because she is able to grow only a "fierce, bitter garden" of "twisting vines and nurtured bristling cacti" (27). She particularly hates her niece Ammu because Ammu dared to quarrel with her fate as a man-less woman, which Baby Kochamma could not. Baby Kochamma's life, now lived in the reverse, could be a great piece to register feminist anger, but Rahel takes care to caricature her so mercilessly as not to allow the reader any interaction with her. In fact, most of the humour in the novel is generated at her cost. Consequently, Baby Kochamma remains at the periphery of our consciousness despite holding the center-stage in the drama of torture, oppression, destruction and death. By positioning the grand Baby aunt of Rahel both as the perverse, determining power and as its victim, the author contextualizes its historical perspective.

The fact that Rahel is re-creating the story by looking at her life in retrospect brings into focus the interplay of memory and

time, both constituents of history. Memory retains the past and freezes time, but time, the irreversible flow forward, creates its own truth. The process of historical events becomes an act of “remembering forward,” to use Barthe’s term (While 1984: 13). Reconstructing history—familial, personal, social, political, mythological and literary—Rahel struggles with the chronological time, freeing herself from both cyclical and historical time. With the past cultural models as structuring meanings on the present, she emphasizes the symbolic capacity of the society to re-produce itself and impose meanings on socio-cultural practices. Touraine calls this the process of placing “historicity at the heart of society” (Touraine 1977:24). Roy provides the mythical view of history by evoking the Kathakali dancers’ stories of Kunti, Karna, Bhima and Dushasana, “Great Stories” that have no secrets to hide. In these stories time and history meet to give them their perennial appeal:

... Kathakali discovered long ago that the secret of the Great Stories is that they *have* no secrets. The Great Stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again. The ones you can enter anywhere and inhabit comfortably. They don’t deceive you with thrills and trick endings. They don’t surprise you with the unforeseen. They are as familiar as the house you live in. Or the smell of your lover’s skin. You know how they end, yet you listen as though you don’t... In the Great Stories you know who lives, who dies, who finds love, who doesn’t. And yet you want to know again. *That* is their mystery and their magic (229).

Could we weigh the novel in this scale? Does John Berger’s line used as epigraph “Never again will a single story be told as though it’s the only one” point towards the continued resistance offered by authors all over the world and through times immemorial? In that, all “Great Stories” give us the historical concept; and in that *The God of Small Things* becomes not only a Great Story but also great “herstory”/history. Chako explains history with the simple metaphor of an old house at night, “with all lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside.” To understand history one

has to go inside and listen to what they're saying. And look at the books and pictures on the wall. And smell the smell (52).

The children create their own images: the old deserted house of Kari Saipu across Meenachal is named History House which remains a throbbing symbol of history and historical happenings all through the novel. The History House becomes the local version of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. This house once belonged to one Britisher Carry Sahib who is called Kari Saipu in local dialect. Carry Sahib was a pervert who exploited young children for sexual pleasure and was reputed to having "gone native." In the premises of this dark, unlit house, both literally and metaphorically, most of the drama is enacted including Ammu-Velutha rendezvous. Somehow, Roy creates a localized version of colonial history by setting the crucial part of the action in the Heart of Darkness—the dark, unfathomable Meenachal which claims an innocent life, the sinister, unlit house of the local Kurtz, the murky deeds followed by Velutha's death. "Marlow's lie" in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is substituted by Estha's innocent "lie" resulting in the destruction of the innocent twins. The death of Sophie Mol haunts Rahel/Roy as she tells her mother's story. "It is curious how sometimes the memory of death lives on for so much longer than the memory of the life that it purloined... The loss of Sophie Mol was always there... It ushered Rahel through childhood... into womanhood" (16). The woman Rahel, analyzing her childhood, re-presents the decisive connection between childhood experience and resistance. The distinction between public and private, communal and personal blurs as the resistant consciousness emerges.

IV

Both *Ice-Candy Man* and *The God of Small Things* look beyond the local problematics of communalism and the institutionalized practices of oppression, and resist their overall effect on human

beings—on the victims as well as the victimizers. This is made possible through the memory of Lenny and Rahel, intervened and aided by the omniscient authors giving the third person perspectives, respectively. In the process, the novels provide authentic commentaries on the social, political and historical forces that shaped their psyche and offered them the views of the cultural realities of their respective societies/nations. The dynamic reconstruction of the historical field—personal as well as national—addresses itself subtly to the failure of the transformative energies of the nation. What makes their observations striking is their ability to focus upon the key issues through their elitist positioning—Parsi and Syrian Christian—as Westernized communities. During the Hindu-Muslim-Sikh religious frenzy Lenny stands aside to watch, comment upon and formulate her ideas; Rahel, on the other hand, stands away from the communist agenda and the Hindu traditional caste/class system but observes how her own community is implicated in the Big-Small, upper-lower dynamics.

The child/adult protagonists offer resistance to the colonial situation from their postcolonial vantage position, but each represents a different, individual and national stance. *Ice-Candy Man* stands at the crucial juncture of national history. The country Lenny sees is still India but the leadership Sidhwa appreciates and upholds is Pakistani and criticizes is Indian for which her novel came under disapproval from the Indian scholarship. In *The God of Small Things* the colonial forces are present persistently through their absence. Chako's assertion that they are "a family of Anglophiles." (52), Pappachi's servile attitude towards the whites that Rahel ridicules as CCP British (*chi-chi poach* British), and the residue of the colonial master's superiority complex in looking down upon those below him, come under Roy's attack. What she resists and is bitter about is the double standard of the society including the communists. The novelists successfully appropriate anew positions that have a

long history of colonialism in which decolonization as a process of change becomes meaningless in the context of the narratives. And as Lenny regrets her “truth”, and Rahel is anguished by their (Estha’s and Rahel’s) “untruth”, the narratives indict the adult world for its treacherous exploitation of the innocents. It is here that history’s truth loses its authenticity.

It is significant to note that both the child-narrators are seven when their stories start and eleven by the time the situations reach the climax. Age seven is crucial for a girl child in the sense that by then the gender construction is over, and the girl has already imbued social mores and norms. Sociologists and social psychologists authenticate that in the first five or six years of childhood, “the female child is exposed to the cultural lore which defines her core identity and the structures of her life-space” (Parikh and Garg 1989: 99). Lenny starts her book complaining of her “compressed” world and Rahel recasts the death of Sophie Mol that not only remains as an agonizing wound but a tragedy leading to many tragedies. Between the time span of four to five years (from seven to eleven), Lenny and Rahel register the full implications of the happenings around them, and this, despite their naivety. Another significant point is that neither Lenny nor Rahel experience direct repercussions of gender discrimination. Lenny is a pampered and protected child and Rahel has a marginalized status that she shares with Ammu and Estha. Yet the novels record with precision female vulnerability.

In critiquing historical situations that dehumanize man, Bapsi Sidhwa’s novel resists history’s unpredictable and wayward course; in attacking power politics that renders the powerless vulnerable, Arundhati Roy’s work becomes a multi-dimensional resistant text. It does resist all “isms” to show how between the spurious ideological conflicts, it is human life that is held at stake. The two novelists have not written stories; they have floated ideas. In one of her prose pieces, Arundhati Roy writes (in another context) that there can be “nothing more humil-

iating for a writer of fiction to have to do than restate a case that has, over the years, already been made by other people in other parts of the world, and made passionately, eloquently and knowledgeably” (Roy 1998:62). On the same principle neither Rahel nor Lenny re-writes the story of human fall from grace but each one focuses on the implications of that fall. Sidhwa and Roy shatter the recent myths of history and look beyond their texts well into the struggle of the child-narrators to articulate their female experiences. Each author succeeds in her scheme to provide us with the girl-child’s self expressive views of history, politics and society. They both dare to listen to the pains of their protagonists, to report the ravages and persist in finding their strength from the sources that have caused inestimable anguish. If Conrad created his *Heart of Darkness* from within patriarchy, both Lenny and Rahel (Bapsi Sidhwa and Arundhati Roy) create it from their unique inside-outside female position.

Notes

1. See Gerd Bjorhovde. *Rebellious Structures: Women Writers and the Crisis of the Novel 1880-1900* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1987). Bjorhovde argues that the rebellious structures created by the feminist writers by mixing and merging narrative techniques and styles are indicative of the writers’ dissatisfaction not only with the woman question but also with dominant modes of writing in terms of narratology and the material format (180). In *Subversive Discourse: The Cultural Production of Late Victorian Feminist Novels* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), Rita S. Kranidis maintains that New Woman Writers “attempted to instil in their readers a critical consciousness that would effectively end their complicity with mainstream literary values” (76). See also Marilyn Bonnell’s “Sarah Grand and the Critical Establishment: Art for [Wo] man’s Sake” (*Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 14 (1995) 123-48).
2. See *and Literature* (Delhi: DK Publishing House 1992: 47-53). Jain discusses the Jasbir Jain “Gender and Narrative Strategy,” Iqbal Kaur, ed. *Gender narrative strategies that women writers use for*

self-expression and self-discovery. Evolving narrative strategies is a conscious effort for women to fight marginalization and to create a tradition of their own. These various techniques are: (i) reinterpreting ancient myths and legends, (ii) subverting the given images, (iii) repetition, (iv) using elements of fantasy, (v) narrating the story from male point of view, (vi) using body language, (vii) and creating a space for women by assertion of the self through the ending of the novels. Jain briefly refers to the techniques used by Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Bharati Mukherjee, as also by some Western novelists. She admits that it is difficult to draw a segregating line between men's and women's use of narrative strategies, but observes that women's perspective is specifically important to understand woman's responses to women's situation.

3. In *The Parsis of India* (Leiden/London; Brill's Indological Library, 2001) Jesse S. Palsetia focuses mainly on the Parsis in Bombay city, but the discussion is varied and elaborate and can be applied to the community in other parts of India/Pakistan. The book traces the history and pattern of Parsi settlement, their institutions, questions of Parsi identity in the light of their religion and community laws and the Parsi contribution to Indian nationalism. The strength of the community lies in its unity and ability to adapt themselves to the country and its culture. Palsetia concludes the book thus: "History reflects that while the unforeseen course of events ultimately determines the destiny of peoples and nations, it has always remained within the Parsis' ability, when they are so united, to reshape their circumstances and influence events to their benefits" (337). See also Eckehard Kulke, *The Parsees in India: A Minority as Agents of Social Change*. (Munich, 1974); and Phirozeshah Mehta in Natesan, G.A. & Co., ed. *Famous Parsis: Biographical and Critical Sketches*, (Madras, 1930). Mehta wrote in 1889 that it would be in the interest of the Parsis as a minority community to join the activist movement and make a space for themselves in "moulding the lofty destinies of this magnificent land" (332). See also, Novy Kapadia et al. Ed. *Parsi Fiction* Vols. 1&2, for informative material on the Parsi community and perceptive papers on Parsi fiction.
4. See Bapsi Sidhwa's remarks in Chelva Kanaganayakam, ed. *Configurations of Exile: South Asian Writers and Third World* (Toronto:TSAR, 1995):87-88.

I do regard Gandhi partially to blame for the Partition.... I think that the Partition was a mistake.... I blame Mountbatten a lot. He has left us with many problems.... Naturally the Indians have brought out their own perspective, to deify Gandhi and Nehru. Well, the world had deified them. No doubt, these are men of great stature, but in the interim the Muslim role has been vilified altogether. Jinnah has been made out to be a villain (qtd in Kapadia 2001: 152).

5. See Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, "Abducted Women, the State and Questions of Honour: Three Perspectives on the Recovery Operation in Post-Partition India." Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis. Ed. *Embodied Violence*, 1-31. Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin articulate the abducted women's problems from the socio-religious as well as personal angles. Most of the abducted women "recovered" during the state oriented recovery operations, faced the dilemma whether to stay on with their abductors-turned-husbands or to go back to their families. In either case their fate was not secure: For those who were recovered against their wishes, the choice was not only painful but also bitter. Abducted as Hindus, converted and married as Muslims, recovered as Hindus but required to relinquish their children because they were born of Muslim fathers and disowned as "impure" and ineligible for membership within their erstwhile family and community, their identities were in a continual state of construction and reconstruction, making them ... "permanent refugees" (16).
6. For comments on Virginia Woolf's and Dorothy Richardson's use of narrative technique, unsupported by the conventional devices, see Sanya Andermahr et al., ed. *A Glossary of Feminist Theory*: 175-76
7. For discussion on the question 'A Woman's Aesthetic?' see Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993:83-86). Morris agrees that though it is difficult to establish an essential link between femaleness and forms of writing, women's writing shows how women have turned their anger into a source of creativity; wittily reshaping the male canonical forms into artistic innovations.
8. William Walsh praises Salman Rushdie's innovative and complex use of Narrative techniques in *Midnight's Children*: "Combining the elements of magic and fantasy, the grimmest realism, extravagant force, multimirrored analogy and a potent symbolic structure,

- Salman Rushdie has captured the astonishing energy of the novel unprecedented in scope, manner and achievement in the hundred and fifty year old tradition of the Indian novel in English". William Walsh, "Indian and the Novel". *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature: The Present*, ed. Boris Ford (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1983:258).
9. Arundhati Roy's interview with Sanjay Suri. "All India Writers Get Lumped with Rushdie... It's Irritating." *Outlook* October 27, 1997:121.
 10. In her discussion on 'Gender and Genre', Terry Eagleton explains women's special relationship with the novel. She refers to Juliet Mitchell's exploration of women's writing who, using the psychoanalytical approach, suggests that the woman writer must be feminine and reject femininity. "This she achieves when she 'creates a woman's world within her novels... while rejecting that world by the very act of becoming a novelist, by taking up the pen..." (88-92). See Terry Eagleton, ed. *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).
 11. A large number of papers/articles are available on Arundhati Roy's novel in scholarly journals, magazines, and newspapers, studying her work from various angles—post-colonial, post structural, and post modern, feminist, and linguistic. Besides these two anthologies contain some good discussion on her novels. See *Arundhati Roy: The Novelist Extraordinary*. Ed. R. K. Dhawan (New Delhi: Prestige, 1999) and *The Fictional World of Arundhati Roy*. Ed. R. S. Pathak (New Delhi: Creative Books, 2001)

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Five

Revisionist Mythmaking as Resistance

Where are the histories,
Our tragedies, our books
of fact and fiction?
Where are the legends?
Where are the myths, the tales?

—GARRETT KAORU HONGO
(Japanese-American Poet)

Absurd may be the tale I tell,
Ill suited to the marching times,
I loved the lips from which it fell,
So let it stand among my rhymes.

—TORU DUTT
(Indian Poet in English)

Revisionist mythmaking as a potent instrument of resistance and creative self-assertion represents the feminist *angst* to redefine the traditional myths and to re-conceptualize woman's relation to and place in the culture. Contemporary women's discourse employs it to explore how women writers, women media persons, and visual and performance artists, subvert and reinvent existing cultural mythic structures and ideologies oppressive to women, and create an emergent and emancipatory mythology. In literature, revisionist mythmaking challenges the canonical

texts both at the structural and thematic levels and enriches the literary tradition. Myths are symbols and signs that codify values and beliefs and shape the culture, whereas mythmaking is the action of modifying and renewing those modifications. Revisionist mythmaking is the potential of the writer to appropriate the mythic tale or the mythic figure for altered ends, which may ultimately make cultural change possible (Showalter 1985:317). Traditionally, women as storytellers have employed myths to articulate social predicament and difficulties, but since they have never had any active role as mythmakers, what they voiced remained the repetitive versions of the dominant values and ideals.

The values and ideals of a culture are ingrained in its myths and stories and the myths and stories in their turn construct and define the culture and perpetuate its values. Culture is, as G.C.Pande observes, "part of a consciousness which is self-conscious" (Pande 1972: 9) and myth is the "intuitive wisdom" of that culture (Pande 1984:189). But culture as seen here stands for the hegemonic, mainstream value system of which women form a part. The act of "revision" provides a key to locating and defining women's experience within that hegemonic value system. Used both at creative and critical levels, revision appraises mainstream mythmaking practices of mis/representation of women and interrogates the justification of perpetuating and sustaining gender inequalities and oppression. Revision connotes "looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (Rich 1980:35). By looking back, women's discourse deconstructs the locus of power and reconstructs the past. In that, revision challenges the traditional myth and embarks on a quest for alternatives. Alternatives perform the delicate but difficult task of demonstrating the power of mythic images as sources of strength, and privilege female agency. This process of demystification can be reappropriated as resistance as it represents female subjects who refuse to be contained by

dominant and repressive ideologies. Revisioning thus remains crucial to the making of new myths that draw from the past and project into the future.

Myth as an ideological practice within the feminist literary criticism and feminist theory can be traced to the rise of the second wave feminism in the West. While Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957)¹ and Roland Barthes in his *Mythologies* (1973),² were providing the theoretical framework of traditional canonical myths, feminist theorists were inquiring into their structural patterns, and deciphering the politics of foregrounding male experience and beliefs through them, and were exploring the possibility of writing a counter-mythology from a woman-centered point of view. Once feminists discovered the power of myth to define women's experience, they tried to appropriate new definitions and new meaning to the existing definitions. Adrienne Rich gave a call for "re-visioning" the old pattern (1980)³ and claimed that revision implies remembering and refocusing on the past. Revision, according to Rich, does not mean simply retelling a previously told tale but signifies the process of scrutinizing, reconstructing and rewriting by molding the language and the concept whereby the old story is invested with new meaning. Revision is an "act of survival," a "drive to self-knowledge" achieved through "re-writing." Feminist discourse deploys rewriting to map female-centered myths and to reintegrate them into female experience as a liberating and promising value. It is a postmodern strategy for:

...activating the 'other' suppressed and concealed by dominant modes of knowledge: it articulates the unsaid, the suppressed, not only of the texts and signifying practices, but also of the theories and frames of intelligibilities shaping them. Voicing this silenced 'other' displaces the dominant logic—dislodging its hegemony and demystifying its 'naturalness'—and unleashes an alternative potential (Ebert 1991:888).

Tilde Sankovitch also expounds the transgressive implications and the generative functions of the feminist mythopoetic enter-

prise in her discussion of myths of desire. Revision according to Sankovitch is a process of “recovery and reformation” by which old myths are driven away and revitalized by reinterpretation (Sankovitch 1988:146).⁴

In the 1980s and 1990s there was a proliferation of literature discussing and developing new myths from women’s experiences resulting in the generation of a female epistemology. *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, published in 1983 attempted to create counter-mythology to view myths from a woman-centered angle and to displace the traditional dominant mythologies that have devalued and suppressed women. The idea was to recreate a past with focus on women as god invested with power. Kim Chernin’s *Reinventing Eve* (1987) and Paula Caplan’s *The Myth of Women’s Masochism* (1985) reconstruct the Hebrew myth of the ‘Fall’ and deconstruct the myth that women are masochistic, respectively. Estelle Lauter’s *Women as Mythmakers* (1984)⁵ examines women writers and artists to find out how they give expression to powerful mythic energy. Lauter also examines the myth of mother goddess to get insight into the female experience.

In the Indian cultural context where the concepts of the mother goddess and the feminine principle are integrated within the traditions, and where myths are a living reality of daily life, any redefinition of womanhood needs to be undertaken with caution. Although many contemporary women writers in English as well as in the regional languages are adopting the revisionist practices, pretending to give battle to the age-old norms, they seem to be wary of following blindly their Western sisters as some of our myths are hard to be repudiated. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the stories from the *Puranas*, the legends and the tales coming down from the hoary past are not just epics or fictive pieces or old wives tales but they are the living embodiment of our cultural consciousness, with the characters well-integrated into the psyche. Meenakshi Mukherjee’s perceptive observation that Indian people are closer to their mythology

than the Irish or the British are to Celtic or Greek lore speaks for the hold of mythological and legendary tales on Indians. Mukherjee further asserts:

If a world-view is required to make literature meaningful in terms of shared human experience, then the Indian epics offer a widely accepted basis of such common background, which permeated the collective unconscious of the whole nation (1974:131).

The position of women vis-à-vis the traditional myth is ambivalent in Indian culture. Sita, Sati, Savitri, Damyanti are familiar figures in the Hindu imagination, they are the epitomes of devotion, wifely duties, supreme sacrifice and the begetters of sons which leads to the all-too important position of motherhood. On these legendary women stands the entire structure of Indian woman's identity imposed on her by means of the various versions of these stories. Internalized by women, these icons of the culture and their tales are important for their ego ideal. Commenting on the hold of the Sita myth on Indian psyche, Sudhir Kakar observes that through recitation of the *Ramayana*, reading the text, listening to it, or acting out the story through the familiar folk theatre like Ram Lila, a Hindu man or woman asserts his/her cultural identity (Kakar 1996: 63-4).⁶ Further, the Vedic culture extols the feminine principle in Nature—nature as a mother, loving but unpredictable, bountiful but withholding; she must be propitiated through a wide variety of rites and rituals. Indian folklore, religious practices and texts contain abundance of this man-nature dyad and the femininity inherent in this matri-focal culture. The concepts of *Prakriti* (nature), her *Lila* (activity), *adi shakti* (the primal power) are all feminine. The feminine cult thus “represents power, an image of resurgent and fearful strength” that is also irrevocably associated with the concept of *Shakti* (Nandy 1980: 35-36).⁷

Contemporary Indian women writers stand at a curious intersection—on the one hand, they are the carriers of a culture that

is a peculiar blend of victimhood and triumphant strength, on the other, the Western feminist concepts imbibed through the postmodern/postcolonial encounter, highlighting the drawbacks of their indigenous culture, encourage them to doubt and counter the cultural constructs. Thus their acquired Western vision has to compete with the inherent experience of tradition (both written and oral), and with the community that that tradition formulates. This accentuates the tension between the textual authority and the contextual code, and produces what Mikhail Bakhtin calls “double-voiced discourse”—the character’s tendency to assert herself and the author’s skepticism about breaking the moribund propensity of some aspects of their own cultural heritage. It is this double resistance—resistance to the restrictive cultural/traditional myths as well as to the sexual politics—that draws my attention while reading revisionist mythmaking as resistance.

This chapter examines the revisionist mythmaking in Anita Desai’s *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1982), and Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992). In both the novels, myths are rewritten in order to articulate the recovery of the female voice. While Githa Hariharan uses the traditional myths to re-vision the past and reconstruct Devi’s present, Anita Desai erodes the more personal/social myths associated with the protagonist’s father to let Sita break free from her constricting past. The two works have a gap of a decade between them—*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* was written in 1982 and *The Thousand Faces of Night* in 1992—but they show similarity despite obvious difference. Each translates the marginalized and the silenced other into the central figures in the narrative; each seeks to recover the female history lost to the silences of the dominant myths; and each succeeds in creating female spaces for the protagonists with the possibility of their becoming visible subjects. Sita’s final step to go back to the mainland with her husband is an autonomous decision taken after reclaiming

her identity; Devi's resolve to go back to her mother is also her personal choice. Her decision can be interpreted as an attempt to reconstruct the paradigms of a woman-centered culture; Sita's act can be read as the retrieval of women's history that prepares her to confront reality. Whereas critics place a big question mark on Sita's return, they read in Devi's journey back home as a sign of assertion. The experience in both the cases is of transcendence that vouchsafes for both—Sita and Devi—the modes of establishing women's identities. To this discussion we shall return at a later stage in this chapter. Suffice it to observe here that by the revisionist mythmaking Anita Desai and Githa Hariharan struggle as artists to creatively expose the subjugated images and restore them from extant texts to reclaim the specificities of that history from the anomalous workings of male-oriented representation. Sita's triumph lies in Raman's acknowledgement of the validity of her resistance against the tedium of daily existence; and Devi's quest begins in its end when like Tennyson's Ulysses she affirms her determination to embark on her quest all over again.

II

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Githa Hariharan embarks on a revisionist project to rewrite the indigenous myths in order to transcend the dualism between aggressiveness and passivity. This dualism is expressed in terms of a masculine versus a feminine approach to life, neither of which Hariharan seems to accept. The masculine/feminine binary is a creation of the patriarchal culture, of a society based on masculine ideals in which the female has only a passive role. Hariharan is angry at women's passivity and uneasy about the masculine overbearing attitude and she expresses her protest by displacing old proverbs, tales and legends. Central to her novel is the recovery of the female voice achieved by the recodification of the cultural myths so essential

to a sense of self and community identity. The 'community' here is perceived as the community of women as a class whose position is remarkably similar vis-à-vis ideological domination. Through meaningful mythological tales interwoven into the real life situations of her characters the author works out a solution in which neither masculine aggressiveness nor feminine passivity is allowed to hold the centre-stage. While the protagonist, Devi resists her irrelevance in the masculine culture by empowering herself through the act of narrating/writing her story, the text resists the hegemonic structuring of a woman's space by revisioning. Githa Hariharan does not attempt to explain her stance directly but suggests an authoritative justification of female assertiveness through an implicit acknowledgement of her own imbrication in re-vision and reconstruction of the past. The result is that, out of a commonplace theme of marital incompatibility, she is able to present a story of the collective struggle of women.

Thematically, Devi's story is one of gaps and silences in marriage that leave a woman paralyzed with unfulfilled desire. When life with Mahesh—her taciturn husband who is unconcerned about her psychological needs and is always given to imposing his will on her—becomes unbearably tedious, Devi looks for some colour, finds Gopal's music mesmerizing, and enchanted by the man walks out of her marriage to join him. Soon, she notices his frivolous approach to life; the myth she has built around his music as his divine symphony is shattered; his callousness in using music as a means to trivial, self-serving ends disillusion her. Disenchanted, she leaves him and goes back to her mother. Symbolically, after discarding the mundane world of music, Devi is welcomed by the soothing tunes of the *Veena*—if Gopal's music is marred by his consumerist tendency, her mother's atonement is purified by years of self-sacrifice.

This simple story achieves multi-dimensional proportions as the lives of other women, both legendary and contemporary, are

captured in the moments of Devi's retrospection that shape their identity as gendered subjects with the conflicting spaces. At this level, *The Thousand Faces of Night* becomes the story of female quest, of female desire and empathy. A strong structural pattern supports the otherwise effete theme. The interwoven tales, the erosion of proverbial concepts and cultural symbols and the substitution of old myths by the new mythmaking project link the present to the past and shatter the myth of women's acquiescence to customary cultural norms. The text becomes a vehicle for expressing the sexual politics and the cultural dilemmas of female subordination. As traditional images acquire new meanings, the novel affords glimpses of an alternative choice whereby the female protagonist resists her objectification, acquires agency and becomes self-directed.

Published in 1992, the novel at once caught readers' attention for having encoded the whole of women's history and for transcending the theme of women's existence to address the problematic of identity and autonomy. The novel negotiates between three spaces—the traditional Indian space, the Western feminist discourse, and the postmodern concern for a culture-specific approach. Postmodernism gives the artist and the critic tools to both represent and demystify the everyday social reality; as an ongoing cultural process it “installs and then subverts” (Hutchison 1993: 243) the very concepts of the discourse it structures. Feminist thought, on the other hand, has defined and redefined women's cultural spaces. It contends that women do not belong to the “sub-cultures” but they live in the duality produced by their place in the general culture and women's culture. It also suggests that though women constitute a muted group, they are able to assert the importance of their functions as women and seek a distinct place within the dominant ideology. They are thus not contained in the ideology.⁸ It is at this point of intersection that *The Thousand Faces of Night* is situated. Hariharan draws from the Indian past, “subverts” the concepts of the dominant

discourse and “installs” the unwritten histories of women’s lives into the textual production. In the process of re-inscribing the indigenous voices from her privileged position of re-visioning, she deconstructs the stereotype images of women. In that she invites the readers to participate in the alternative mythic design wherein the characters uphold their dignity, dismantle the hegemonic mythic structure and detach themselves from systemic dominance. When Devi walks back home with “quickenened” (139) footsteps to meet her mother, she is not her uncertain ‘self’ but is a self-assured individual who knows her mind and is determined to “stay and fight.”

The novelist’s resistant perspective is traceable to two narrative strategies—first, intertextuality and second, the use of framed-narrative pattern. In the former are the inset stories handled from a revisionist standpoint to provide an ideological counterpoint to the prevailing notion of women’s passivity; to the latter can be assigned the use of inset stories as a structural device. Through revisionist mythmaking, Hariharan re-writes the old legends, re-conceptualizes women’s relation to each other and to men, articulates women’s experiences, and interrogates the male canons; through the framed-narrative, she revisits the events from different points of view, providing the work what A.K.Ramanujan calls spatio-temporal context.⁹ Thus revisionist mythmaking and the use of framed-novella form operate in the construction of female agency and subjectivity. The novel also offers recognition of patterns of domination and abuse of women by the patriarchy that contains primarily men but also has women as their representatives. The case in point here is of Mayamma’s husband and his mother. How Mayamma is victimized at the hands of both and how she becomes the living monument of the persistent cultural myths will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

A work of fiction is a transposition of material from varied sources—both literary and non-literary. Roland Barthes opines

that, “bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc. pass into the text and are redistributed within it” (Barthes1981:39) that make it a point of intersection. In Githa Hariharan’s novel under study, these “bits” and “formulae” are drawn from Indian culture and Indian poetics to structure her story of a contemporary Indian, educated, middle-class woman. The narrative then posits an alternative Western feminist discourse to read and interrogate woman’s place in the culture. In moving from one plane to another, from one point to another, the story gathers momentum and exemplifies how Indian women writers can successfully define themselves, with great subversive potential, against the dominant culture. This fluid movement from and between different modes of writing and representation—memory, fantasy, myth, folklore, time-shifts, interior monologue, flashback, the changing point of view and irony—is central to the novel that provides an intense experience to the reader.

The novel opens with a short ‘Prelude’ that sets the stage for ‘re-vision,’ for “the act of looking back”. It goes to the credit of Hariharan’s art of fiction that in the ‘Prelude’ she opens up a vast vista before her readers in less than 300 words, and prepares them for an encounter with her structural design. In recovering the female story, the author/narrator proposes to make use of myth and memory to return to a time/space from which she will reconstitute her identity. That the novel should open with an “I” is in itself a bold step towards self-assertion. Further, the “I” tells us what she likes (which is indicative of a self-directed individual): “the story that comes whole and well-rounded, complete with annotations” but she hastens to add that she has always “come across the sharp, jagged ... variety” (vii), signifying the unruly pattern of life. The pattern is woven with her grandmother’s colorful stories. Devi reconstructs these stories in retrospect and tries to find new answers to the old myths, “I must have asked my grandmother “why” thousands of times.

She must have answered me... and the answers I now reconstruct were perhaps never really hers. Perhaps I put the oracular, paradoxical words into her generous... mouth” (vii). All through her life Devi has asked questions and though she calls herself “foolish enough” for asking questions, her curiosity shows her to be a quester, a seeker in the traditional sense—asking questions, seeking clarifications, trying to grasp the essence. Subtly the author displaces the myth that a woman cannot be a quester, that it is a male prerogative.

The myth, however, is not easy to cast off. It persists with Mayamma’s foreboding words: “so be careful, Devi ... when you next ask a question” (viii). Obviously, in Mayamma’s view of life, it is for a woman to submit mutely to life’s vagaries, without questions and queries. A question coming from a subaltern is construed as a challenge, as an act of disobedience and resistance. Life’s blows wizen Mayamma and she knows what it means to be curious. As a pragmatic storyteller Mayamma recounts her harrowing experience when she had asked a ‘why’: “When I lost my first baby, conceived after ten years of longing and fear, I screamed, for the only time in my life, Why?” (vii). Her question was greeted with a philosophical observation from the village doctor and a volley of blows on her weak and bleeding body from her mother-in-law. Mayamma learnt the lesson of life that a woman must “bear some pain,” as the village doctor advises her because no one can do anything “about the sins of [her] previous birth.” As Devi reconstructs Mayamma’s story, her tone is neither aggressive nor condescending; instead, it has an unmistakable undertone of resistance.

The method of time-shifts experimented in the ‘Prelude’ is used with advantage in the entire narrative along with first person and third person shifts in point of view. Indeed, the ‘Prelude’ is “a striking experiment in an innovative study of the interrelation between narrative technique and feminist theory of contemporary women’s fiction” (Nair 1994:76). It encompasses

the novelist's reasoning, as also her emotions, sensations, memories and fantasies.¹⁰ Together, the structure helps to re-vision the past, re-write women's history and erode stereotype.

The novel exploits the formal possibilities of the framed-narrative in which there are stories within stories leading from one theme or idea to the other thus advancing the discussion to its culmination. Framed narrative is indigenous to India and has been a part of its ancient aesthetic tradition, followed in almost all genre of writing: epics like the *Mahabharata*, long narratives such as *Kathasaritsagar* and *Panchtantra*, fictional works like *Kadambari* and folk-narratives like *Vetal Panchvinshati* are all framed narratives having one or more framed narrators. The framed narratives could be passive or dynamic. In the passive frame, diverse stories are told and the frame functions only as a link. In dynamic frame, there is mediation / a mediator between the frame and the stories. With comments and discussions the story advances. In the Western tradition of writing, women have been using the framed-novella form since the fourteenth century through the seventeenth. Particular mention may be made of the pioneering works in the field as Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cite des Dames* (1405) and Marguerite de Navarre's *L'Heptameron* (1549) that articulated the women's viewpoint in a dialogical form. The feminist framed-novelle tradition originated in France and spread to the continent. The inherent structural tension between the inset stories and the frame commentary sets up a dialogical potential in framed-novelle, which the women writers exploited, to focus on the female situation to oppose the dominant ideological voice.

Githa Hariharan uses the traditional framed-narrative form with variation. There is no *Sutradhar* to advance the stories. Instead, in those chapters where the stories are told from the first person point of view, there is the protagonist who recapitulates the inset stories and comments on them. The stories are revoked from memory as they were told by her grandmother.

The comments are a recent addition. The process leads to the preservation of the matriarchal oral traditions. In the chapters where the third person perspective is followed, Devi's story is advanced, subsuming the inset stories. The central hermeneutic by which to interpret these chapters is woman's silencing and their resistance to misogyny. The novelist's viewpoint is embodied in the progress of a mind undergoing a series of experiences at personal level linked with the heard myths.

The frame of the novel is primarily of women's oral culture. In the Indian *Guru-Shishya* tradition, the pupil as the seeker sits at the feet of the Guru, imbibing spiritual knowledge. The tradition, however, works on the occlusion of women. There is scant mention of women as seekers except perhaps Lopamudra and Maitreyi who were inducted into the esoteric knowledge and asceticism by their husbands Agastya and Yajnyavalkya respectively. Hariharan breaks the male tradition to initiate a female pupil, Devi, as the seeker. The first of her teachers is her grandmother, the second is Baba and the third is Mayamma. Her mother Sita becomes her role model much later in life when Devi empathizes with her mother in a woman-to-woman understanding. Significantly, the pupil, Devi, has a number of queries to the stories recounted by her grandmother and Mayamma; to Baba's stories she has no questions. His narratives are loaded with the patriarchal lore and Devi neither accepts nor rejects them. His stories supplant the grandmother's stories and provide a male view of wifehood—a position Devi casts off later.

Let us first consider Baba's stories and their implication to revisionist mythmaking. Baba's stories of saints and mystics, musicians and scholars are didactic and as Devi remarks, they were "less spectacular, they rambled less," further, they were never "flabby with ambiguity and even fantasy" when compared to her grandmother's stories. Herein probably lies the difference between male and female narrative styles. Baba "defines the limits. His stories are for a woman who has already reached the

goal that will determine the guise her virtue will wear. They make one point in concise terms: that the saints lived according to the time-tested tradition” (51). Told in a matter-of-fact manner, they point to the wifely duties. There was Muthuswamy Dikshitar whose music was so enchanting that it wiped out his beautiful second wife’s desire for jewellery. Lesson: for a woman her husband is the best and costliest ornament. But how do we condone Dikshitar’s second marriage to a beautiful woman because his first wife was dark-skinned? In that he is following the typical patriarchal model which Baba does not take into account. Since his parents arranged the marriage Dikshitar is absolved of all responsibility. Another lesson for Devi is that as a Brahmin, she must “shrink from all honors as from poison” and covet humility as nectar (52). Baba has his theory that a woman’s path is smooth and well lighted. “The path a woman must walk to reach heaven ... is a clear, well-lit one. The woman has no independent sacrifice to perform, no vow, no fasting; by serving her husband, she is honored in heaven” (55). When juxtaposed with Mayamma’s life-story or grandmother’s mythological tales, Baba’s accounts appear threateningly patriarchal. It may be recalled here with some advantage that in Shashi Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time*, Gopal also argues that women do not suffer existential angst as they are fulfilled in childbirth and that they have no need to look elsewhere for spiritual quest.

Without Baba’s stories, the grandmother’s narratives would lose much of their resistant verve. As an astute artist, Githa Hariharan contextualizes Baba’s narratives so that Devi sees through the cultural construct and is able to reverse it. The author seems to be clear that the myths imposed on the feminine psyche need to be revised and re-visioned. What Baba tells partly to initiate Devi into wifely duties and partly to entertain her is, in fact, re-enacted in the reverse in Devi’s real life. Baba pictures a wife as patient, uncomplaining, undemanding, contented, and silently and unobtrusively working for her husband’s welfare.

This picture confirms his son Mahesh's unexpressed but implicit ideas about marriage and wifely duties. Mahesh does not lay down rules for Devi (they are already there in the archetypal consciousness) but he expects her to run the household expertly as per the traditional notions, to socialize only where and when *he* permits her to, to learn what *he* wants her to learn and above all not to ask questions. Their conversation is often flippant, decisive, with *his* as the final word:

"Teach me to play rummy," I said.
 "But we play for stakes," Mahesh said.
 "I'll borrow some money from you then," I said.
 "Don't be silly, all the others are men," he said. (79)

This seals her fate and she knows she will not be able to break his silence after that. Or let us take another example:

"I want to learn Sanskrit," I said.
 "Why," Mahesh asked.
 "So I can understand Baba's quotations better," I said.
 "Don't be foolish," he said, "The English translations are good enough. And what will you do with all this highbrow knowledge?" (52)

or

"I must look for a job, I have so little to do," I said.
 "What can you do?" Mahesh asked, like a ruthless interviewer stripping away the inessential (64).

In short, rather than helping her get over her difficulties Mahesh creates more problems and poses hurdles in her way. He is not only unsympathetic but also insensitive to her loneliness and need for company.

If her grandmother's stories sent Devi soaring high into the world of fantasy, Baba's stories coupled with Mahesh's attitude put her firmly aground. Before allowing Devi to erode the patriarchal web of myths created by Baba and reinforced by Mahesh, the novelist erodes the myth of male superiority by hinting at his

inability to retain his hold on his wife. Devi does not cast any aspersions on Baba. He is a gentle and sweet person but according to his son he “is still to learn how things work in real life” (55). Is Mahesh alluding to Baba’s failure on the home front? Is it an oblique remark on Parvatiammas’s desertion? As an individual, Baba is a revered figure—a Sanskrit scholar, old, bearded, and learned, almost like an ancient ascetic. Devi sits at his feet to learn the ancient lore. But, Baba is no Yajnyavalkya to forsake his life as a householder, telling his wife, “Maitreyi, verily I am almost to go forth from this state of householder.” Instead, it is his wife Parvatiamma who shrugs off the mantle of a householder for her spiritual quest. “She had, like a man in a self-absorbed search for God, stripped herself of the life allotted to her, the life of a householder” (64). Devi wonders if Parvatiamma had misread Baba’s stories or had “turned them upside down and taken the contradictions, the philosophical paradoxes, to her logical conclusion?” (64), to leave without proclaiming her intention. Later, Devi repeats the matriarchal history created by Parvatiamma by leaving Mahesh in absentia. It is the reversal of the traditional male-female situation in which in the name of taking *sanyas* man absolves himself of all responsibilities that ultimately fall on his wife. There are umpteen examples in life and literature to substantiate this—Prince Sidhartha (Gautama Buddha) leaving his wife asleep, Sri Aurobindo forsaking the mundane, and even Gandhi to an extent when he takes a unilateral decision to follow celibacy, as also many male protagonists in recent fiction who abandon their family life for their existential urge. Women leaving their home in frustration, anger or for religious reasons is also not new to contemporary literature. R.K. Narayan’s Savitri leaves her home in frustration and Anita Desai’s Sita goes to Manori Island to escape life’s monotony. Earlier, Sita’s mother had deserted her family and gone to Benaras in search of peace or may be God. The change is worth noting here. The women of the older generation like Parvatiamma, Sita’s mother, the wid-

owed aunt in Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* and Raman's aunt in *The Painter of Signs* leave their homes, albeit in frustration or anger, and head for Benaras in search of God but the women of the new generation leave for purely personal gratifications, maybe sexual or psychological. Critics see this withdrawal variously as quest for autonomy, individuation or as deviant behaviour. Feminists read it as women's need for a new space that Mary Daly defines as "new cosmosis." But Hariharan allows us to read a distinctly different message in Parvatiamma's desertion by eroding the myth of wifhood and motherhood. She also erodes the male belief that a woman has no need to seek salvation or fulfillment because her world is contained within the threshold.

Baba's stories of ideal wifhood and motherhood stand to question when they are read along side Mayamma's real life accounts of suffering, victimization and cruelty. She is the living example of what patriarchy does to a woman's body and soul. Her husband is irresponsible and cruel; her vagabond son is the exact replica of his father; and her mother-in-law is a tyrannical female patriarch who relentlessly represents the hegemonic order. She is the instrument of torture both literally and metaphorically. Mayamma suffers so much that wifhood and motherhood cease to mean anything to her. Neither her husband's desertion nor her son's death moves her sufficiently; rather it is a relief. Githa Hariharan gives Mayamma the narrative voice to recount how her inner being is dried up by the assaults of existence:

And so, my daughters, my tale nears its end. I have teased death, courted him, quarrelled with him. He walks only two steps behind me, eager not to miss a single blow dealt out to my cowering body, as I walk the route that leads to his darkness.

I have learnt to wait, when to bend my back, when to wipe the rebellious eyes dry. So, with this meager wealth that has fallen to my lot, I say, go, Devi, search for that forest you crave in your delirious youth. Go deep, deep into its hollows, and into the wild terrors of its dark stretches. My words wing in a different direction and build a nest

for the coming of night. Yours, thirsty, seek the river, miles away, where the dim forest gives way to a clear, transparent flood of light (126).

Through these two short paragraphs assigned to Mayamma's brooding, the author unravels two significant points: first, Mayamma is not the legendary Savitri to have quizzed the God of death; nor is she Nachiketa to grill Him. Death is a welcome release and noticeably, the myth of woman's empowerment through husband/son is a deception; second, Mayamma ruptures the conventional cultural images of loyalty and chastity so carefully built up by Baba when she almost becomes an accomplice in Devi's escape from the confines of an oppressive conjugal home. In understanding Devi's sexual cravings, she views her own sexuality with positive connotations; this is also how vicariously she voices her resistance to what she suffered all her life. Mayamma has seen life, has experienced its darkness and has felt its throb when her cousin (her childhood friend) visited her briefly. She has the uncanny ability to understand Devi's inner conflicts and desires as neither idealist Baba, nor taciturn Mahesh could ever understand. Her connivance at Devi's flight, her sympathetic inclination towards the inscrutable and seemingly insane ways of Lakshmiamma, and the enigmatic longings of Parvatiamma can be construed as her unobtrusive acts of sisterhood. In reciting the long list of Goddesses' names in her daily prayer, she draws heavily on mythic images of the feminine, each presenting the goddess's different aspects but each demonstrating women's ambiguous status in real life. This daily ritual, performed mechanically and interspersed with her recollection of the past events is in a way subversive discourse more likely to be invoked as resistance.

Once Mayamma's life experiences and Baba's stories are juxtaposed with grandmother's tales and the three are put in their proper perspective, it is easy to recognize the revisionist possibilities of memory "working through" the past. Devi of-

ten recalls her grandmother's stories and tries to compare her rendering of the myths and legends with Baba's accounts culled from the same source. The male-female difference in the choice of themes and the manner of narration becomes obvious. Devi concedes that whereas grandmother's "stories were a prelude to my womanhood, an initiation into its subterranean possibilities;" Baba's tales were for a woman who was already a wife (51); her grandmother spread before her the "feast of bride's choice, the regal dignity and the solemnity of a *swayamvara*" (18); he laid down the unchanging, univocal and male-authored norms of silence and submission. Unfortunately, the grandmother's world of fantasy was as far removed from the real life situation Devi was to encounter in life as Baba's delineation of the implicit inside space of a woman (which turns on predominantly moral grounds). Both failed to recognize and grant her the individual inner space of feminine fulfillment. Damyanti's *swayamvara*, so graphically described by the grandmother turns out to be a myth in Devi's personal life, and Baba's picture of a chaste wife reaching heaven "even if childless" is a harrowing blend of lyricism and totalizing male discourse that contradicts reality. Significantly, in using the word "*swayamvara*" for Devi's arranged marriage, Hariharan subtly satirizes the entire traditional gamut of arranged marriage in the context of contemporary terms. This is the author's symptomatic resistance to different but related domination.

The grandmother's story of Damyanati's *swayamvara* was evocative and the grandmother perpetuates Devi's dream by assuring her that she too would be wed like the princess. Damyanti's marriage was a grand affair befitting her regality, so was Devi's wedding as per her family status. But the parallelism ends here. For Devi marriage becomes a one-sided affair. It leaves her unfulfilled. Mahesh is too matter-of-fact to give in to sentiments; for him marriage is something that "happens." To Devi's meaningful question why he married her, his unromantic reply is, "Whatever people get married for..." with a rejoinder,

“Thank God we Indians are not obsessed with love” (54-5). Marriage does not bring the rapture of acceptance, love and fulfilled desires; it brings only slow pain. She calls it a sacrificial knife that does not plunge but only draws a drop of blood at a time. She broods, “The heart I have prepared so well for its demands remains untouched, unsought for” (54). It may not be out of place here to recall Anita Desai’s Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* who feels miserable when her husband Gautam fails to notice the fragrance of petunias flowering in spring; almost same despair can be found in Devi’s simple but eloquent sentence “Mahesh does not see the rain” (78). These thoughts, though expressed in the passing demonstrate their desperation at their husbands’ insensitivity. For Devi, life with Mahesh is deadening:

After the early rites of initiation, learnt on old knees; the skills perfected under the eye of a jealous mother; the token rebellion, a concession to youth; this then is marriage, the end of ends, two or three brief encounters a month when bodies stutter together in lazy, inarticulate lust. Two weeks a month when the shadowy stranger who casually strips me of my name, snaps his fingers and demands a smiling handmaiden. And the rest? It is waiting, all over again, for life to begin, or to end and begin again (54).

The reality of Devi’s life belies the grandmother’s vision and assurance that Devi will be like Damayanti—beautiful and light-skinned—when she grows up, that a prince will wed her and that the couple will have a happy life like Nala-Damayanti. Further, childless Devi senses how the grandmother’s definition of a nymph as a woman who is eternally youthful because she never has children, is a myth for a woman whose natural instinct craves motherhood. At one juncture Devi remembers Yudhis-tara’s answers to the Yaksha’s questions—wife is a friend and a safe refuge. A mother is heavier than the earth and a father is higher than heaven. In Mahesh and Devi’s relationship, the bond of friendship never develops; and motherhood, which could have enhanced her status as a woman eludes her.

The story of Gandhari is particularly significant for Devi to understand her mother's self-sacrifice and her extraordinary efficiency, perfectionist tendencies and ambitions. Legends and myths tend to glorify Gandhari as a supreme example of wifely devotion—she blindfolded herself because her husband was sightless. But, Devi reads between the lines and surmises that Gandhari's self-sacrifice is a myth, a male construct; what is real is her rage against an unjust order. As a contemporary woman writer Githa Hariharan allows her characters to read Gandhari's story as a saga of resistance to and retaliation against the deceitful contract that bound her destiny to a blind man. In the case of Sita (Devi's mother), after her father-in-law's angry outburst, she stifles her love for music, breaks the strings of her *Veena* and cuts herself off from her past to become a self-directed woman. It was "a neat, surgical cut," says Hariharan, which changed Sita's life. People glorified her as an expert house-manager, a self-sacrificing wife and a strong woman with ambitions for her husband's upward mobility and daughter's education. But at what personal cost? Nobody comprehends that part. When Devi reconstructs Gandhari, both her mother and Gandhari acquire human personalities. Sita ceases to be an enigma and Gandhari is no longer the formidable mythical queen and matriarch.

Sita's rage is almost comparable to Gandhari's; it transforms her completely. Dwelling on Gandhari's fury Devi acknowledges divine anger as understandable and explicable, but what Devi finds hard to believe is "human anger: that it could seep into every pore of a womanly body and become the very bloodstream of her life" (29) and transform the character as it does in Sita's case. In Sita's dictionary, illusions, desire, emotions have ceased to have any place. On the day she tore apart her *Veena* and killed her love for music she "seized" illusion "firmly by its roots and pulled it out of her soul" (105). Juxtaposing her mother's hurt pride with Gandhari's injured self-esteem, Devi redeems women from the myth of deification and sees them in a realis-

tic light as human beings—complex, complete, yet vulnerable. Devi admits, “Gandhari’s pride, the fury that was to become her life-force, the central motive of years of blind suffering, was no piece of fiction” (29). When Sita’s pride is hurt and her creative urge is stifled, she protests by rejecting the patriarchal definition of herself as the “other” of man and acknowledging her anger by an act of intense self-sacrifice; stoically accepting life as it comes, always performing her duty, never wavering in her decision, never questioning. Her motto is “concentrate. Think. Plan. Then aim” (42). This she follows literally in life—first, she removes Annapurna from her home with a firm hand when she senses danger of sensuous passion and her husband’s inclination towards the young girl; then, she manages to send her husband on an overseas assignment, and in one sweep she decides to pack off Devi to the U.S.A before the Brahmnical culture imbibed through the ambiguous myths should damage Devi’s rationality. Despite her vigilant planning, both Devi and her father become accomplices in a world of “books, daydreams, gods and goddesses” and secrecy—a world in which the mother is barred entry (105).

Devi often thinks of her mother in terms of the immutability of a mountain. She dreams of her as “a mountainous woman, beautiful but with strong limbs of an ox” (41) and of her father as “a god-like hero, a hero who flew effortlessly across the night sky, and who guided me gently when he saw my own desperate desire to fly with him” (46). Between the strong, ox-limbed mother and a dreaming father, Devi grows up to be a frail woman, unsure of herself, unable to assert herself. The mother remains a far off, unsentimental, unfeeling, inscrutable figure for her till Devi is able to retrieve her as an individual, as a “female human being.” In her retrospective moments when Devi excavates from memory Gandhari’s myth and re-reads her mother’s story, her vision clears. She sees and understands her mother’s revolt against the internalized images of self-sacrifice and against the traditional

norms that obliterate female identity. Both Devi's mother and Gandhari are denied their identity which gives rise to psychic tension that drives them unmercifully to find means to express themselves, labouring to bring forth their own meaning to life, wrestling with the problem of giving vent to their individuality in ways that appear socially unaccountable and psychologically unbearable. Change is discernible in Devi when she understands her mother and identifies with her; Devi ceases to be a shadowy figure and for once she takes her own decision—whether right or wrong—and stands by it. Even Sita discovers her buried self once she revives her bond with her daughter. The enthusiasm with which she tends her garden is an indication of her motherly affection:

The garden was what she wanted it to be. Leaning back for a well-deserved pause, seduced by the sweet smells in the air after sunset, Sita found herself slipping, in the unguarded moment that came more and more often, into dangerous quicksands. She found herself unable to resist the luxury of remembering; for the first time in her life she gave in and delved ferociously, obsessively, into life that had been (99).

Translating the traditional role of motherhood, Sita becomes the eternal muse, Saraswati of the Indian mythology, as she picks up her *Veena* once more and transforms her anger into creativity. Devi gets a warm home-coming with the lush garden welcoming her inside the house filled with the elevating notes of the *Veena*. By revisionist mythmaking Githa Hariharan creates her own narrative space, and allows Devi and Sita to reinterpret and reinscribe their own.

Grandmother's mythmaking has two specific points: first, her stories are of self-assertive women who resent being pawns in the patriarchal culture, and second, she neither upholds the system (as Baba does), nor does she censure it. C. Vijajasree's discerning observation needs be stated here to reiterate the first point:

Devi's grandmother's narration is a kind of revisionist mythmaking in its own right: she does not dwell on the more prominent figures of the Hindu myths—Sita, Savitri or Anasuya often celebrated as paragons of female virtue. On the other hand she retrieves the marginal figures of Gandhari, Amba and Ganga—long relegated to minority status, almost forgotten and often rendered silent and invisible in patriarchal versions of myths (Vijayasree 1996: 178).

The grandmother develops out of each myth a parallel story of a living woman. Gauri's story is analogous to the folklore in which the woman marries a "snake"; but whereas the woman in the lore is lucky to have retrieved her husband out of the snake-skin, Gauri is not so fortunate; another real life story is of Uma, Devi's cousin, who is the wronged woman like Amba with the difference that Amba can "find means to transform her hatred, and the fate that overtakes her, into a triumph" (36), Uma is denied such a power; she has to come back home a traumatized, broken woman. The author uses monsoon metaphor to determine the sadness of the episode with everything "damp, limp, full of murmured secrets" (35). After Uma's return, the grandmother is gripped by unknown fears for Devi, weaves fantasies around Devi calling her "the *devi* of our house," and assuring her that she "would be treated as a goddess of good fortune" wherever she went. Remembering this Devi broods, "It strikes me now that her face was touched by a sadness when she said that, sadness and perhaps a shadow of uncertainty" (36). In fact, Devi realizes later that her grandmother's narratives were of heroes and heroines with immense possibilities that are denied to woman in real life. "The difference between Amba, and a mere mortal, a woman like Uma, lay in the strength to seize sorrow and uncertainty, and pour the mixture into the sieve of her penance. Whatever emerged, however bloody and vengeful was a distilled potion of good fortune. No heroine died without this powerful and destructive protest that left its mark, a memorial to a fighter, behind her" (40). For a woman in real life, existence itself is a

tight rope walk, be it Mayamma or Sita, Devi or Uma, Gauri or Parvatiamma or Lakshmiamma, all have to struggle for balance, to find some means of survival. It seems relevant to state here that in one of her short stories, Ajit Cour aptly calls her heroine 'Bajigarni' who has to maintain a delicate balance between her husband's command and her own sentiments for her son. The act is arduous and mentally exacting.

Devi's grandmother has experienced life; she is aware of the pitfalls of breaking the rules, but she is also aware that following the rules blindfolded would mean jeopardizing the self. Building her stories around the culturally accepted myths she works out a method to protest. Instead of explicitly giving her opinion, she answers Devi's numerous queries in cryptic phrases and leaves it for Devi to decode them as and when necessary. Some of her enigmatic replies mean many things: "a woman meets her fate alone" (28); "all husbands are noble, Devi. Even the blind and deaf ones" (29); "everything about a bride is a secret" (19); "it is never their fault. It's always ours" (33); "a woman fights her battle alone" (36); "[a] woman without a husband has no name" (38); "Can a daughter raised as a daughter become a man" (39). The stories come back to Devi at different stages in her life; she infers meaning according to the exigency of her situation. At one point she longs for "a story of her own" (137), and that is the moment she realizes that she has been running away from trials, that she has been an escapist all her life; she gains strength and allows her repressed unconscious to surface. Like the heroines of her grandmother's tales, she becomes the re-mythologized female to resist the masculine discourse of power.

The myths and legends that her mother feared would make Devi dreamy, indulging in fantasy, ultimately give her a renewed vision. They become tools in her hands to counter unjustified assumptions about women. Now in Devi's dreams of her mother becomes her mentor, showing her the way to fight injustice, sometimes with connivance, sometimes with the weapons of

anger. Devi visualizes herself as Durga “walking the earth to purge it” (43). An all-women world is created round Devi in her nightmares with an intermingling of the myths of woman’s passivity, her submission and her power. Sati, Parvati, Haimavati, Gauri—all legendary figures symbolizing woman’s virtue—along with real life figures—Mayamma, Annapurna, Parvatamma, Gauri (the maidservant), Uma and others—who suffered and survived, recur in her dreams. The picture is given a final touch with Devi emerging as Durga “yellow-faced woman with ten arms” the war-thirsty heroic figure. The real life suffering women look on her as their “saviour,” they urge her to take up weapons and strike, “Despite your grace, you are born to kill,” they chant, “ride into the night ... and devour the demons” (94). Like Kali, she must roar and smearing her face with blood, she must dance her dance of death and destruction. Far from being the creation of a queasy mind fed long on improbable myths, these nightmares are an indication of female wrath expressed through the unconscious. It is an effective feminist method of saying the unsaid, of showing resistance. In terms of Indian culture, this aggressiveness and activism is nuanced and located within the systemic availability of the goddess myths in which Durga and Kali stand as the divine symbols of assertion and autonomy. Psychologically, it is an effort to resolve the deep inner frustration she experiences with Mahesh and her inability to transcend the barriers imposed on her by the social mores. Here, the goddesses become an alibi for her defiance. The invocation of these authority figures shields her from the moral anxiety generated by defiance of one’s internal authority and atones for that defiance.

Githa Hariharan’s choice of the name Devi for her heroine has cultural connotation. Devi is the matristic principle known by her seven hundred names, among them Durga, Kali, Kalyani, Chandi, Mahamaya, Mahadevi being more popular. The image of Shakti thus crafted is one of self-sufficient autonomy; she is procreative but not secondary or dependent; she is the resisting

force if her order is threatened; she creates and maintains the world and fights against the demons without male support. By locating Devi as the protagonist witnessing the struggle between patrimony and maternal authority, the author deconstructs the assumptions about female nature as dependent and incapable of agency, devoid of energy, sexual or otherwise and counters the fallacies in the canonical myths. Moreover, by making three females—Sita, Mayamma and her grandmother—as Devi's mentors, the author raises a maternal trinity as against the patristic canonical male trinity. Further, the names Sita and Mayamma acquire symbolic relevance when the myths are used subversively: Sita is not subdued and submissive like her name-sake of the *Ramayana* and Mayamma may be Maya (illusion) or Durga who in her own way, explodes the myth of motherhood and wifehood. She does not grieve for her son and her husband; their going does not leave any gap in her life; rather she finds peace in her widowhood and childless status.

Another significant point concerns the epigraph to the novel from the Vachana of Devara Dasimayya:

Suppose you cut a tall bamboo
 in two;
 make the bottom piece a woman,
 the headpiece a man;
 rub them together
 till they kindle:
 tell me now,
 the fire that's born,
 Is it male or female,
 O Ramanatha?

Hariharan questions here the cultural concepts of woman's desires and makes almost an androgynous statement. If both man and woman have desire, how far it is advisable to deny it to the woman; what is the validity of suppressing it; why should one run away from it as Mahesh does; why should women's desires

go unuttered? Hariharan boldly speaks the unspeakable and lets Devi express it when she resists Mahesh's uncompromising attitude to sex and chooses to go to Gopal. That she is disillusioned by Gopal's shallow approach to life is again an indictment of the thin margin between the male attitude to love/ lust; it is love she seeks, not lust nor unemotional ritual.

Re-vision provides Devi the rewarding experience of eliminating the surfaces to peep within; she also embraces the truth so long rejected. This 'truth' is the female truth that leads to the re-discovery of the self by recognizing her own experiences within the mythical structure. However, it would be a reconstruction and imposition of an intended meaning on the text were we to construe that Devi is able to break through the patriarchal hegemony and empower herself through her revolt. It is argued that by foregrounding and re-visioning the myths and legends, Githa Hariharan demonstrates the nature of female resistance through cultural narrative. Conversely, she also offers resistance to the concept of the deification of female energy as it is at odds with the lived reality of Indian women. In reading the novel as a revisionist text, the rationale here is not to rescue the text from patriarchy and restore it to the mother but to bear out that knowledge of female nature in textual representation and therefore in the culture, allows for the possibility of change.

III

Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* does not endorse a sharply defined myth-making position, but it subtly subverts the web of the existing myth Sita lives by and reinscribes female resistance to ideologies oppressive to women. The text provides rich material for interpreting revision as resistance. The dominant motif is of escape though the text posits an ambivalent attitude to it. If the mimesis is sympathetic to Sita's escape from the monotony of her life in Bombay, the rhetoric

is simultaneously uneasy about the real meaning of her escape. Who escapes? From what? To what end? Ethically, is Sita's resentment to and escape from the so-called trivial incidents madness? Or are those who put up with violence and connive at it mad? On the one hand, female escape from containment and reintegration into the status quo holds out a promise and possibility of liberation through re-vision and self-assertion; on the other, the only alternative the text makes available to Sita to come to terms with her identity is through a journey both literal and metaphorical. She undertakes a perilous journey physically (perilous for her condition, being in advanced stage of pregnancy) in an attempt to reconstruct her past. Myth and memory converge with her construction of her 'self'. The novel's title with an interrogation mark and a suggestion of flight frames the author's revisionist myth-making strategy, manifesting her intent to inscribe the unwritten story of the magic island, thus creating a space for Sita to reinstitute herself.

The title of the novel is in itself a metaphor for journey. It is a question that seeks suggestion without any indication of the journey's beginning or its culmination. Interestingly, Raman poses this question every year to the children before their vacations but the trip is planned as per Raman's convenience to a place primarily of *his* choice. That particular year, that is the monsoon of 1967, Sita asserts herself and takes the decision to go to Manori, an island near mainland Bombay. The family is surprised, not only at Sita's stubborn persistence but at the choice of as unlikely and bleak a place as Manori. The children resent, her husband tries to argue but Sita resists any imposition on her will. Through Sita's resistance, Desai attempts to subvert the oppressive structures and traditions by enunciating a historically silenced female consciousness and a submissive "femininity" within the dominant discourse. There is another reason too. In order to give voice to the silenced Sita, and to recontextualize her story, the author must allow Sita a return to her buried past and history in which she could potentially lose herself. Her

journey to remembering imitates the quest of the male hero. Traditionally, questing and undertaking a perilous journey is the male prerogative. Women's fundamental experience is one of endless repetition and waiting, of experiencing time as 'stasis'. Sita has had enough of waiting, enough of repetition of everything—violence, pregnancies, and the meaninglessness of everyday existence. Now she wants to conjure up her past, the magic of it all, the excitement of life as it was.¹¹

As in the fairy-tales, Sita's past is encased on the island of Manori. Going back to the island entails physical journey; recasting the past implies a voyage back in time. Symbolically Moses' role in rowing her to and from her past safely, albeit contemptuously, and Moses and Miriam guarding the old palatial house where she stays to re-live the past, help in shattering the present Indian political myth of religious divide and upholding the rich India tradition of secularism. Structurally, the novel does not follow the framed narrative pattern as *The Thousand Faces of Night* does; it has only one inset story on which the myth of the magic man rests. Divided in three parts, the story moves from the present to the past and to the present again, covering a period of almost twenty years from 'Winter 47' to 'Monsoon'67'. Each significant event is revisited from different angles in a narrative which employs third person perspective. The act of re-remembering the past serves as a springboard for an alternative interpretation of the mythic figure's story—a restructuring that Sita explores through her memory. Thus both structurally and thematically, Desai's text reflects the desire to revitalize the myth of the island and of her father and then to re-vision it. The protagonist self-consciously situates herself in relation to the myth by choosing to stay in the old, dilapidated house. Moses's hostile reaction to her visit bears witness to the threat of losing their hero, Sita's father, to a woman-centered reinterpretation. They resist her openly, "Let her go. Who cares? We will only remember him, the father" (157), say Moses, Jamila

and others thereby reiterating male superiority and their desire to re-establish the father's myth that Sita, the female, has eroded by her presence. The circular pattern of the novel is re-instated as the story ends, not with Sita's departure but with the villagers' revoking faith in the myth of the magic man.

The novel incorporates the story of Sita, a middle-aged housewife with four children who resents her fifth pregnancy and decides to revisit her childhood home. Melancholy and bored by her wasteland existence in her Bombay flat, she undertakes the unusual journey with an equally unusual determination—to withhold the birth of her child by magic. She is loath to bring forth her baby in the violence-ridden world where creativity has no chance against the overpowering destructive impulse. Hers is, in fact, a quest for magic by which her father had hallowed the island. She wants to “achieve the miracle of not giving birth.” Recapitulating her faith in her father she asks herself:

Wasn't it Manori, the island of miracle? Her father had made it an island of magic once, worked miracles of a kind. His legend was still here in this house—in the green tinge of the night shadows, the sudden slam of a wooden shutter, the crepitation of rain on the roof—and he might work another miracle, posthumously. She had come on a pilgrimage, to beg for a miracle of keeping her baby unborn” (31).

To matter-of-fact Raman, the idea is not only crazy but bizarre too. His sane advice to her is to stay in a place that is easily approachable and where the modern medical and other facilities would be available. He has nothing against Manori as such, but he knows the impracticability of her decision. Sita rejects his suggestions, refuses to hear his voice afraid that it may eventually silence her. She must reclaim the past through the memory of the mythic figure. She must retrieve her personal history; she must resist her meaningless existence. Myth becomes an important imperative for her to reconstruct her reality and to empower herself.

Myths have a transformative import and when re-written with feminist perspective, they foreground women's view of existence and validate female experience. Acknowledging the hold of myths on the Indian psyche, Anita Desai points out in one of her essays that myths are "the cornerstone on which Indian family and therefore Indian society are built" and that they keep women "bemused, bound hand and foot" (Desai 1990: 14). In engaging her protagonist Sita in the act of revision of her father's myth and magic within the discourse of her narrative, Desai displaces the patriarchal power by dislocating the distorted cultural practices. During her retrospective moments, Sita realizes that her father, far from being a magician, was a shrewd man who knew how to hold the people in his power; the villagers and the sycophant *chelas* perpetuated his myth and he cleverly let it grow and circulate. Hindsight gained during her stay at Manori makes it possible for Sita to see through the entire gimmick and once the myth is ripped open, her own life starts falling into its rhythm, making sense of its ordinariness. Revision becomes for her what Adrienne Rich terms "an act of survival" (Rich 1980:35). Ironically, the male hegemony is not ready to let the myth be obliterated. After Sita's departure, Moses and others resolve to keep the myth intact; to forget the daughter and think of the father only. Although their resolution does not affect Sita's self-knowledge, Desai's art shows ingeniously how rapidly the masculinist truth tends to seize power. It may be relevant to mention here that Anita Desai diffuses the tension between myth and reality in her novel *Clear Light of Day* by allowing Bim to deconstruct her childhood image of Raja as a great poet of the stature of Byron. When Bim realizes that Raja was after all an ordinary, imitative scribbler of verses, writing derivative poems and that his poetic genius was her own fabrication, she is able to dislodge the image. All tension subsides as she accepts the ordinariness of life.

Ordinariness of life is what Sita is not ready to compromise with. Still under the spell of the excitement of living with a freedom-fighter father, Sita thinks of life in terms of the extraordinariness she had once experienced. Life after marriage changes its course—it appears monotonous because it is smooth, more regulated, and comfortable, which Sita could neither accept nor comprehend. She resents the stereotypes, looks for the same value system which existed prior to her marriage and expects life to be a gala affair without responsibilities. Her problem is that she considers ordinariness as myth and her father's magic as reality.

The clash between myth and reality, reality and myth produces tension. She offers resistance to everybody and everything associated with her new home till she is dubbed unhinged. Alienated from Raman, his family, his friends and her own children, she loses all interest in living, becomes melancholy and bored. That is the reason why when Moses and the villagers in Manori encounter a sad looking angry woman, they are disappointed. They reject her as “plain” (156), as a “nobody. Not like her father” ...who was “like a god—the magic man” (165). While such summations speak of the conventional attitude of the society that devalues and excludes women, they are also the modes by which the mythologizing tendency of the human mind is perpetuated. The author examines the problem of enunciating the mythmaking potential of the female subject by representing the entire gamut of events from Sita's consciousness. This device is important to give voice to the female as the speaking subject because thereby woman assumes the central position.

Sita's inner turmoil, which critics are quick to read, is due to the ambivalence of her situation—being a part of the patriarchal myth yet unable to conform to the system. As a girl she always doubted and questioned her father's mysterious powers. But with the passage of time, she has forgotten her misgivings; what she remembers is the island, her father's popularity and the colourful, free and pristine life of the island. Symbolically, her posture of

waiting can be read as her expectancy to re-live that life once again. Her familiar pose of late, in her Bombay flat, is to sit on the balcony, smoking, looking at the sea occasionally and then again at her book pretending to read. This often triggers familiar question from Raman or from her children, “Are you waiting for someone?” At such moments she feels claustrophobic at her restrictive life in the flat.

Physically so resigned, she could not inwardly accept that this was all there was to life, that life would continue thus, inside this small enclosed area, with these few characters churning around and then past her, leaving her always in this grey, dull-lit, empty shell. I’m waiting, she agreed—although for what, she could not tell ... (54).

Here in her Bombay flat nostalgia has transformed her into “a living monument of waiting” (55). Conversely, the island seems to hold a promise. For years it remains buried beneath her consciousness. “Its black magic, its subtle glamour had grown too huge, had engulfed her at a time when she was still very young and quite alone” (57). That was the time when the island both attracted and frightened her. After her father’s death, the security offered by Raman comes as a welcome relief, but with it comes the “dull tedium” of the sameness of commonplace life which she has not bargained for. After about two decades of anger, annoyance, frustrations and despondency she decides that she has had enough of it all. She must turn back her gaze, go and find the island so as to be whole again, to be a part of the magic.

The magic Sita reconstructs during her stay in Bombay is in fact a fabrication she has started believing as true. Probably, it was her way to survive in a society so alien to her. Alone and confused after her father’s death and her sibling’s desertion, Sita is exposed to a society whose norms and values she could hardly appreciate. In the absence of a mother and thrown in with a freedom-fighter father continuously on the move, the three children—Sita, her elder sister Rekha and brother Jivan, lead a near-nomadic life. We are not told how the two, Rekha and

Jivan, cope with life's realities; once they leave they are almost lost forever in the story. There is only a passing reference to Jivan becoming a trade union leader and Rekha, a radio singer. But we are given sufficient clues to know how Sita remains ill equipped to adjust to society. Her revolt against the placidity of her husband's family, her nausea at the repetitiveness of life, her inability to appreciate the ordinariness of the people around her and her strong reaction to normal everyday realities of living eloquently express her state of mind. She appears neurotic to all who experience her mood tantrums, even critics of the novel do not redeem her. Raman is appalled at her censure of his family's "subhuman placidity, calmness, and sluggishness" (48). She dubs his friends and business associates as "nothing", and declares that children mean only anxiety and responsibility. The only persons and incidents that draw her admiration are—the hitchhiker they meet on their way back from Ajanta, and the Muslim couple she once notices in a quiet corner in the park. That she should consider the hitchhiker "brave" and "innocent" in his ignorance and that her only "happy" moment should be the glimpse of the Muslim couple in the Hanging Gardens, alternately irritate and bewilder Raman. He considers her unabashed appreciation for the former as "infidelity" and the latter as "betrayal." But a discerning reader can discover two strong sub-conscious inclinations of Sita—first, there seems to be a residue of the nomadic life-pattern in her psyche, and second, by repeatedly praising the couple's love, she is offering a kind of resistance to Raman's approach to love and lust. Raman has given her children but not the tenderness of love. When these and many such pent up feelings overburden her, she needs to re-live her past, to return to her childhood, and to the myth created by her father to revitalize herself, and the only choice open to her is escape to Manori.

It would be profitable here to draw an analogy from other texts. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi resists Mahesh's business companions and the elaborate parties. The crowd of men,

their wives and the entire ambiance appear to her shallow. Tara's painting class and the "kitty party-type" women do not appeal to her. She remains isolated from the community of women. Similarly, Maya in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* and Dimple in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* are unable to engage themselves with their husband's acquaintances. Maya reacts to Gautam's business associates and friends and rejects them all, including their wives, as "animals" interested only in sex and food, and Dimple silently but surely discards Ina Mallick, Prixie, Jyoti, and all others who could have been her companions in an alien land. Thus retreated from their community, which is also a retreat from the outside world, these women face conflicts generated by the loneliness of the claustrophobic atmosphere of their homes. Shashi Deshpande's Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* regains her composure after she decides to be useful to the community and goes out to attend on her neighbour's ailing child. In African-American fiction, the protagonists as well as the narrators draw strength by being a part of the sisterhood. Toni Morrison in her *Sula* and Alice Walker in her *Meridien* uphold the significance of woman-woman dyad. Feminist literature of late has shown a strong tradition of adherence to the community, particularly in the sense of sisterhood; at the same time they have shown concern regarding the disturbing isolation caused by rejecting the society. Female separation from men in a traditional society is understandable, but not the dismissal of all human contacts. Desai's Sita and Hariharan's Devi are allowed no interaction with the community (except close relations in the case of Devi; and Raman and her children in the case of Sita). Feminist critics note how severance from the society and the community leads women to self-hate. In a classic example, Showalter observes that in the early decades of the 1900s women often ended up in despising themselves when they failed to establish any real contact with other women (Showalter 1977: 245). Germaine Greer opines that women who find it difficult to form any sort

of community are the ones who “cannot love each other in ... easy, innocent, spontaneous way[s] because they cannot love themselves” (Greer 1990: 11-12).

Within the context of *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Devi and Sita find very few women they can relate to. From the time of Sita’s move to Bombay and Devi’s move to Jacaranda Street, where they have their first contact with the women other than those they knew as girls, they realize that they are not trained to accept other women on equal footing; the women Devi meets have all accepted the structures that she is trying to escape; Sita encounters the women folk of Raman’s family who are stereotypes. Devi’s high educational aspirations have left her unequipped for such contacts and Sita is rendered unfit for company because of her unusual life. It is under such conditions that the Western (white) feminists’ concepts of and insistence on “global sisterhood” appear lopsided. In the third world settings the nuances of women’s position are culture-specific and cannot be understood by any facile theorization.

Sita’s journey into the past is her voyage in time. Part II of the novel, ‘Winter’47’ is sandwiched between her present that is, Part I and III that take place in 1967 and are befittingly titled ‘Monsoon’67’. Part II acts as a mediating force between the two ends of the same present. The distraught, angry, aggressive woman of Part One, is transformed in Part Three into a woman who is ready to accept life. It is a transformation from the passive child to the assertive adult. She has found her way to approach life, which lies not in attempting to control one’s milieu, or in passively accepting it, but rather in comprehending its terms and bringing in changes in one’s perceptions. The novel is open-ended and has possibilities of different conclusions but Sita’s voluntary decision to accompany her husband is an indication that Sita eventually lives with the world rather than against it.

What actually changes Sita's perception is the apprehension of the myth associated with her father and its hold on her psyche that was hindering her self-development. When she sees life in retrospect, she sees her father not as a magician or a mystic but as a human being with personal weaknesses and cunning. His sycophant *chelas* were in fact instrumental in circulating the myth about his powers and propagating his miracles. Sita remembers that it was Kanti-amma who "first used the word 'magic' not father" (71) when he cured a snakebite case. "The villagers repeated it, not the *chelas*" (71). The stories grew around him and he became a legendary figure. Sita's memory painted a colorful picture of her past after leaving the island and during all those years of her stay in Bombay, she remembered only the positive aspects of his magical personality; only the gaiety and laughter of her life in Manori. Consequently, her married life appeared too mundane and monotonous by comparison. It was, indeed, not the magic of the island that held her captive; it was her imagination that blew up the myth larger than life; it was also the charisma of childhood that finds thrill in the little joys of life.

When as an adolescent girl, Sita landed on the island with her father, Rekha and Jivan, she saw the island as "a piece of magic, a magic mirror—it was so bright, so brilliant to her eyes after the tensions and shadows of childhood. It took her some time to notice that this magic, too, cast shadows" (63). The atmosphere on the island was one of "laughter and gaiety" particularly after the earlier difficulties of freedom fighter father's life: living in jails, in "crowded assemblies, in mobs, in slums, tenements, and villages where life was not picturesque or calm, but harsh and barbaric" (63). During her re-vision of the past she realizes that she has been living by the myth; so, first the author allows her to shatter one myth—the myth that life is idyllic and can be relived as such. Compared to the tensions, cruelties, dark seclusions and uncertainties of the political ferment during the freedom struggle, life with Raman should have appeared far more secure

and disciplined. It does, but Sita dreads its monotony. During her re-visit to the island, she takes hold of the myths associated with her father one by one and erodes them. She remembers how even as a girl she was a skeptic and had doubted her father—his dubious ways with women, particularly with his daughter Rekha, with its incestuous hint, his craftiness in holding the crowds, his shrewdness in handling and exploiting the simple village folks, everything came under her scrutiny. She even countered the *chelas* and others and declared that the well water was not sweet. Remembering her acts of resistance becomes a potent instrument leading to the rediscovery of her ‘self’.

If we look at Sita’s early maturing years with her father on Manori Island, we can trace the tangled relations that exist in her life between her early maternal deprivation and the illusory, inscrutable ways of her father, between her experience of living under the glare of the famous father and her later suffocating sense of the seclusion of the privacy of the metropolis. During one of her retrospective moments on the island, Sita suddenly stumbles on a possible explanation for her mother’s desertion. Seeing her father as the “wizard” who cast his net to ensnare the unsuspecting villager folks, mostly women she remembers with distaste how he fed his women patients “with pearls, caressed their long hair, fondled their fingers, whispered magic chants into their ears...”(101).

Her mother was the first to escape from that net. “His wife had torn a hole in the net and escaped into the dark depths of the ocean” (100-01). Sita grows up with the belief that her mother was long dead, till Jeevan tells her the truth. It was easier to live with the myth of a dead mother than to accept the shameful truth of her disappearance. Sita resists her mother’s running away as much as she resents her father’s callousness in crushing her mother’s pearls and jewels to powder for medicinal purpose. With time, she learns to look at her father more analytically and guess the reason behind her mother’s escape. Unable to

reconcile with the reality of a deserter mother, she almost forces Raman after their marriage to locate her somehow. She and Raman make several fruitless trips to Benaras. Ultimately, Sita lives with a sense of loss. Psychologists assert the significance of mother for a daughter's initiation into womanhood and claim that a girl-child's disorienting experience is triggered by the absence of mother love. In her reading of the displaced mothers in Anita Desai's early fiction, Jasbir Jain comments that without the mother the "family structures are upset and dislocated and result in unhappiness for the people concerned" (Jain 1994:52). Sita's father-fixation, the "lopsided" development of the family, her inability to cope with life, her resistance to other women (particularly of Raman's family) and her threatened relation with her own daughter Menaka, can be directly linked to the conflicting emotions that toss her into situations without clear dimensions and comforting boundaries in the absence of the guiding maternal hand. It would be meaningful to note here the difference between male and female attitudes to deserter mothers. Mahesh's reaction (*The Thousand*) to Parvatiamma's flight is sharp. He obliterates her memory, forbids any mention of her name and discards her completely from his life. Sita (in *Where Shall..*) bears no grudge, only a sense of loss. By deserting their husbands and children, both the women achieve their freedom from patriarchal authority and render their husbands helpless, thus representing and establishing the supremacy of their own interests and desires. Their active resistance, however, mandates the dissociation from the power relations and consequently their tales become not one of adventure but of social stigma.

Sita's "act of looking back" and re-visioning her past brings to the fore some important issues of relationship between myth and reality, truth and ideology, and liberation and power. With Menaka's "betrayal" Sita comes to recognize that she can no longer afford to ignore her growing-up daughter's psychological needs and her own responsibility towards Menaka's healthy

mental growth. She must free herself from her fictive past—her “wizard” father and her “courageous” mother. She acknowledges that her urge to “swim back into the net” (101) of her childhood magic is in itself a myth, because how could one reverse the flow of time? The magic island may provide a refuge but it will be a temporary phase at best, and certainly a vulnerable proposition gained at the cost of her present. Moreover, the magic she has come to uncover is a fabrication; it never existed and “if it had ever existed—black, sparkling and glamorous as in her memory—it was now buried beneath the soft grey-green mildew of the monsoon, chilled and choked by it” (103). She also becomes aware that the ideology of escape in search of the ‘self’ may be just one reality of her mother’s life but it became problematic because her mother’s act had harmed the children—Sita, Rekha and Jivan. Sita fails to convince herself that her mother’s way of saying ‘No’ represented female power and that it was an authentic act. The contradictory emotions she undergoes reveal the dichotomy in her thinking. When Raman chides her for running away from responsibility, her immediate response is, “No, no—desertion, that’s cowardly. I wasn’t doing anything cowardly.... I was saying No—but *positively* saying No. There must be some who say No, Raman.” (149). Immediately after, she retracts and calling herself a jellyfish stranded on the sandbar, she tries to make amend for her belligerence. The first declaration about saying “No” denotes self-affirmation; the comparison with Jellyfish, helplessness.

Many critics have questioned Sita’s revolt and her subsequent reconciliation. They indict the author for Sita’s mediocrity. For some critics, her decision to follow Raman’s dictum is too unassertive for a woman who has resisted imposition and who has fought for her ‘self’ all through. This powerlessness after a heroic attempt to break free is too commonplace to be acceptable to some readers. Anita Desai, however, is clear about the ordinariness of her protagonist. In one of her interviews she admits that Sita has no choice but to go back to her life how-

soever humdrum because banging the door shut and walking out like Nora cannot be a solution to her problem nor can she, a middle-aged woman, think of suicide. That would be too juvenile and melodramatic (Ram 1977: 99). In fact, the potent 'No' and the powerful 'Yes' are principally semiotic representations of the difficult desire to choose. In life one can neither be a 'hero' nor a 'martyr'. Reconciliation is the only practicable and mature course open for many of us. In Sita's decision to go back we can recognize a "strong assimilation of the modern and the traditional outlook of the Indian woman..." and the struggle to "connect" the two (Bande 1990: 183). Sita has defied traditions and lived as a nonconformist but she cannot break her home.

Much of her tension vanishes once Sita resolves to dissociate her longing for her lost paradise from the reality of existence. Feminist critics proclaim that it is rewarding for women to look beneath surfaces to retrieve the deep reality within, and to accept the female truth so long obscured and rejected. Adrienne Rich also contends that the "unconscious wants truth." What is Sita's truth? That the magic man on the magic island is a myth and her fulfillment lies in her acceptance of responsibility towards herself as an individual positioned within a specific milieu. Discussing the emergence of woman as a female hero, Marcia Westkott opines that when a woman gains consciousness of herself as an acting subject capable of exercising her own choice and ceases to depend on external validation, she overcomes her defensive reactions and the desire to hide. The desire to hide is the result of the accumulated fears, which Horney calls "the intricate mixture of fact and fantasy" (Westkott 1986: 201) that she is being mistreated because she is weak; this victim syndrome blocks her strength to exercise her choice and to confront actual abuse. Once she is able to deconstruct the dependent character structure that sustains this fantasy, she demystifies the past and acquires self-knowledge that she does not have to be extraordinary to be worthwhile.

Sita's outward voyage was motivated by her desire to hide but it has also been the logical model for resolving the deep inner frustration she had experienced in her attempt to eliminate her present and cling to the past. She succeeds in bringing about a more dynamic unity of her own divided self when she breaks her silence and discusses her fears, longings and ennui with Raman—that her happiest memory is of the Muslim couple, that children mean responsibility and that she had struggled hard to live with Raman and yet “travel alone—mentally and emotionally” to stay “whole” (148). The possibility of communication releases her pent up feelings; the release so obtained helps her negotiate the answer to the proliferating questions in her mind, and finally discover the meaning of life. She admits to herself that happiness had eluded her in the past even on the island. What she has been seeing and running after was a fantasy. She has navigated the waters of memory and explored the remarkable healing that lies within. It is at this point that she candidly admires Raman's courage in facing life as it comes:

He never hesitated—everything was so clear to him, and simple: life must be continued, and all its business—Menaka's admission to medical college gained, wife led to hospital, now child safely brought forth, the children reared, the factory seen to, a salary earned, a salary spent. There was courage, she admitted to herself in shame, in getting on with such matters from which she herself squirmed away, dodged and ran. It took courage. That was why the children turned to him, sensing him the superior in courage, in leadership. (138-9).

The novel also has fairy-tale element in Sita's courtship and marriage to Raman. Sita is beautiful (Raman admits this fact), she is trapped on the island and then rescued by the prince charming, who eventually marries her. In the realm of the magical, the main enchantment for a girl is courtship and marriage to the enchanter and living happily thereafter. Desai takes a feminist position by subverting the pattern. Usually in the fairy-tales the princesses are passive, waiting for the first man to climb up the

wall to free them. Desai's Sita is not the passive princess. Far from drifting from one dependency to another, she tries to exercise her autonomy but in the patriarchal set up her independent judgment is devalued. As a girl, she questions her father's power for which she is unobtrusively relegated to the background; as a young married woman, she resists stereotype ideas, beliefs and values and is feared as an eccentric; in the old house on the island she demands order and discipline from Moses and Miriam and is discarded as crazy. Her flight to Manori is her act of protest and a means of expressing her unconventionality. But in actuality it tends to become a journey from a disclaimed self to a self that cannot be fully claimed and owned. However, before it becomes a traumatic experience, the author provides Sita with revisionist possibilities to see life in new terms. If her voyage to Manori provides her the strength to resist her past, her return to normal life is a revisionist's triumph whereby she is enabled to understand her present after an excavation of the past.

At the crucial moment of decision, Sita remembers the lines from D. H. Lawrence's poem that had eluded her. The poem conveys to her the full import of life's new awakening. The grain, the heifer and the slumberous egg portend renewal, the continuity of life—the past is in one's present and in the present lie the seeds of future. The space of life is not in the uncharted void of outer space; it is always the space at the centre of relationship. In a rare moment of restoration and transformation, she opts for life. Her vision clears and she looks at her husband with affection, acknowledging him to be "the nicest man she knew." "She allowed him, then, to have his triumph, not to try to cap it with her verse. He deserved that triumph purely by being so unconscious of it, so oblivious" (151). After this it is easy to take the final decision. By reclaiming her past, Sita has not only situated herself in relation to the mythic figure, her father, but has also reconstructed her own self. She tries to judge the two parts of her life—one on the island, the other in

Bombay—not knowing which one was real and which theatrical: “How could she tell, how decide? Which half of her life was real and which unreal? Which of her selves was true, which false? All she knew was that there were two periods of her life, each in direct opposition to the other” (153) But then, she also realizes that “life had no periods, no stretches. It simply swirled around, muddling, confusing, leading nowhere” (155). This function of the memory to integrate the past and the present has transformative properties, which according to Homi K. Bhabha can reformulate the traumatized self: “Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (Bhabha 1994:63). In Sita’s case, memory acts as an integrating agent.

One of the significant functions of re-visioning, according to the feminist scheme, is to comprehend how women were trapped within the masculine constructs so as to deconstruct the stereotype images and replace these with reconstituted female self. For years, Sita looks at herself as a non-entity, just an appendage to Raman, a mere housewife and mother. This image is restrictive which compels the female self to live within the socially defined notions of femininity of self-effacement and self-denial. Angry, unhappy and bored middle-aged Sita provides an even more corroding picture of a crazy female, probably, of the witch of the fairy-tales. Visit to Manori clears her vision as she remembers how as a spirited girl she had resisted the untruth woven around her father. She has had “fire” which attracted Raman, as he admits in a weak moment. After her marriage, she resisted the men, women, ideas and beliefs and values of the patriarchal culture that did not appeal to her. She has redefined culture, spoken of her past to herself and by retelling the story has subverted the misrepresentation of herself. On the larger fictional canvas, such retelling of personal story entails the author’s feminist position meant to expose and subvert tradition.

There seems, however, a dilemma in attempting a feminist reading of Desai's narrative, not because she repeatedly denies being a feminist, but precisely because even in this female-centered novel she lets the power remain with patriarchy. Desai erodes the magic man's myth and transforms Sita's rage into the creative urge to give birth to her child but she does not allow Sita to transgress. She lets the power reside with Raman, the male. Two situations serve as focal points to substantiate the above standpoint—first, Raman's final victory and second, Moses' reiteration of faith in the patriarch's magical power. In the typical masculinist tradition, Raman's triumph lies in his punishing power; he penalizes Sita by his overriding silence on the issue of her return home; it is decided that he would take along Menaka and Karan were she unwilling to accompany. And who is the deciding authority? Of course, Raman. Sita toes his line conveniently. It could also be counter-argued here that the feminist definition of power focuses on energy, effective interaction and empowerment, in contrast to the notion of domination or control (Hartsock 1981: 3-19). This gives us an alternative vision to see Sita's transformation as her step towards self-empowerment. Liberation to Desai's heroine is understandably achieved without any recourse to "feminism" as such. Sita learns under which circumstances she must assert herself without falling back into passivity or aggression. Desai's answer may not be the final one but she shows us a way to approach life.

IV

In the two novels—*The Thousand Faces of Night* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*—resistance to patriarchal ideology is offered through the protagonists' identification with and subsequent rejection of the myths; in the former, the myths are varied and cultural; in the latter the myth is more personal and local. Sita's flight is from the private to the public sphere

and back again to the private, whereas Devi's itinerary is in the reverse order. She takes her clue from the traditional mythical stories that have the sanction of the culture, selects her course and flees from Mahesh to Gopal's public glare and back to the more secure maternal home. Desai uses a more symbolic device to allow Sita to re-view the magical properties of the island and be aware of the reality of the Indian middle-class women's situation. In both the narratives, the flight is short-circuited and routed back to the home. Probably, the authors—Hariharan and Desai—do not wish to transgress the value system, though they resist the repressive private domain. After showing the glimpse of the feminist domestic realism of contemporary Indian social condition, each guides her heroine to the safety of the known realm—the home. Within the specified limits, nonetheless, the old myths are eroded, new, woman-centered myths are formed and the protagonists are empowered to ask questions, seek answers and regenerate power-relations. Though Sita's itinerary is limited and so is her revisioning, which is focused only on one man, Sita appears, far more energetic (despite her present physical condition), resistant and fiery compared to Devi. Devi's moves are sly and she is given to self-pity. She endorses the picture of a victim notwithstanding her bold steps, whereas in Sita's anger, reaction to violence and her waiting posture, there is a controlled self-awareness, and a stoic refusal to accept the faulty structure. Despite their tendency to draw heavily on myths and magic, bordering on the fantastic, the two novels are written in the realistic mode that is representative of the Indian woman's circumstances. They define the problematic, attempt resolution of inner/outer, home/world possibilities but keep within the cultural paradigms, as no other option seems to be open to them.

Notes

1. Northrop Frye elaborates his theory of myth in *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). His concern is to read literary functions as mythic functions with focus primarily on myth as content and literary archetypes. For him archetype means a symbol that connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience. "Archetypes," he says "are associative clusters and differ from signs in being complex variables" (102). His study of archetypes revolves round myth, which he defines as "the imitation of actions near or at the limits of desire" (136). He is interested in myth as an abstract or literary world of fictional design. In their limited and technical sense, myths relate to divine or quasi-divine beings. When displaced, myths and archetypes are associated with primitive and popular literature, also when displaced myths are located in "realism" where emphasis shifts from the shape of the story to representation.
2. Barthes's theory is contained in *Mythologies* (Trans. Annette Laver. London: Paladin, 1973). Unlike Frye, he is concerned with myth as form and with its sociological and semiotic aspects. Barthes sees myth as socially produced and almost omnipresent in our daily lives. He calls myths "decorative display" of common sense and asserts that the marker of myth is its creation of universals. He accepts that myths have a historical function but rejects them when they confuse history with Nature. Focusing on its semiotic signification, Barthes argues that "mythology is a language" (11) and myth "is a metalanguage" (115) and "depoliticized speech" (143).
3. In her essay "When Dead We Awaken: Writing as Resistance," Adrienne Rich sums up the significance of revisionary writing to deconstruct the stereotype images and reconstruct the cultural tradition of women. She puts it thus: "Re-vision: the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction, is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we understand the assumptions in which we are drenched, we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the

work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see—and therefore live—afresh.... We need to know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass a tradition but to break its hold over us.” (See *On Lies, Secrets, and Silences: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*. London: Virago, 1980:35)

4. See Tilde A. Sankovitch. *French Women Writers and the Book: Myths of Success and Desire* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988). According to Sankovitch, “The mythopoeic process is ... a process of recovery and re-formation, as the ‘old’ myths are spirited away from their dead, oppressive contexts, and rejuvenated by reinterpretation, rereading, rewriting, all performed in newly found female contexts” (146).
5. For feminist discussion and re-creation of myths see Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983); Kim Chernin, *Reinventing Eve: Modern Woman in Search of Herself* (New York: Time Books, 1987); Paula Caplan, *The Myth of Women’s Masochism* (New York: E.P.Dalton, 1985); Estelle Lauter, *Women as Mythmakers: Poetry and Visual Art by Twentieth Century Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). Caplan analyses the ideology behind the myth of women’s masochism—that women enjoy suffering; and the myth of women’s self-sacrifice; both the assumptions that put women in a disadvantageous position vis-à-vis men. She powerfully argues that there is nothing masochistic about a housewife waiting on her husband, as there is nothing new about a businessman running after money to swell his already solid bank account. “The only difference,” she contends “lies in the social value attributed to each activity” (Caplan, 1985:2). Similarly, Lauter examines how women writers and artists give expression to powerful mythic energy of the mother goddesses. She expresses faith in women’s ability to create new cultural myths of human emancipation. Theorists like Deleuze, Guattari and Susan Griffin present the same vision of emancipation of humanity. Likewise, Mary Daly, Ruth Hubbard, Maggie Humm and Marcia Eliade have been engaged not only in highlighting and critiquing the mainstream mythmaking but also in showing the vital and essential aspects of the feminist efforts as

- mythmakers that bear testimony to the power of women to create a freer and more joyful future for themselves and others.
6. See Sudhir Kakar. *The Inner World* comp. in *The Indian Psyche* (Delhi: Oxford Press, 1996). Kakar opines that for men and women in India, "Sita... is not just another legendary figure, and the Ramayana is not just another epic poem. It is through the recitation, reading, listening to, or attending a dramatic performance ... that a Hindu reasserts his or her cultural identity ... (64).
 7. Part of this discussion has been summarized from Ashis Nandy. *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture* (Delhi: Oxford, 1980: 35-6).
 8. See Elaine Showalter's "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry*, 8.2 (Winter 1981) 179-205. In the section 'Women's Writing and Women's Culture' she discusses how women's writing is determined and conceptualized by their cultural environments and their gender. She further contends that women are not the members of a separate culture but form an integral part the collective experience within the dominant culture. Also see Gerda Lerner's "The Challenge of Women's History," *The Majority Finds Its Past* (New York, 1981:52).
 9. A.K.Ramanujan focuses on the context-free and the context-sensitive grammatical rules in his article "Is There an Indian way of Thinking? An Informal Essay" in McKim Marriott, ed. *India Through Hindu Category*. (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1990):41-58. From grammatical rules Ramanujan shifts attention to culture and then to literature and shows how cultural tendencies can be categorized as context-free and context-sensitive. In Indian culture and literature the preferred formulation is the context-sensitive rule. "No Indian text comes without a context, a frame, till the 19th century." He further observes, "Texts may be historically dateless, anonymous; but their contexts, uses, efficacies, are explicit" (48).
 10. For some more useful critical papers on Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* see S. Indira, "Walking The Tight Rope: A Reading of Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*" in Veena Noble Das and R.K.Dhawan ed. *Fiction of the Nineties* (New Delhi: Prestige, 1994); Urmila Varma, "Satire as a Mode of Expression in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand faced of Night*" in *Indian Fiction of the Nineties* ed. R.S. Pathak. (New Delhi: Creative, 1997); Rama Kundu, "For a Story of my Own—The Female Quest for Identity: A

- Global Perspective" in *The Feminist English Literature* ed. Manmohan K. Bhatnagar (New Delhi: Atlantic, 1999)
11. See my discussion on Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* in *The Novels of Anita Desai* (New Delhi: Prestige, 1988); "Is Sita Mad?" *Indian Literature* (Sahitya Akademi), 139 (Sept- Oct 1990): 179-184; "Quest for Wholeness in Anta Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*—In Search of Jungian Archetypes." *Journal of South Asian Literature*. 22.2 (1987): 87-94.

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Six

Speaking Pain—Resisting Rape

Whoever has succumbed to torture can no longer feel at home in the world.

—JEAN AMERY

When a man pursues, besieges, and batters a woman's body, he assaults a total world.

—CAROLYN R. STIMPSON

Over the past few decades, feminists have begun to resist the representation of women as victims and subjects of fear by emphasizing female will and agency. Their contestations have been on the premise that to view woman as only a passive victim is to deny her the transformative capacity or her agency; and on the same principle, to ignore the determining ideological and institutional structures, which create restricted choices for her, is to negate her perceived reality. In the field of literature, women authors are claiming an autonomous female space and representation by creating specifically feminine forms of writing and by subverting what has been described as the “male gaze.”¹ Literary texts have tried to situate, understand and evaluate women's agency² (Sangari 1993:867-882) by contextualizing the so far forbidden subjects like rape or sexual violence which reify female victimhood rendering women as helpless objects of male ‘desire’.

Rape is a form of systemic and systematic violence against women with a vulgar display of social power relation. Feminist

critiques have more or less carefully located rape and resistance to rape in the context of feminist politics, analyzed the centrality of sexualized violence for women's lives and have sought to reject the hegemonic assumptions that writing or reading rape is prurient. Highlighting several ways that the construction of sexuality contributes to women's vulnerability and subservient position in society, American feminist theorist Catherine MacKinnon points out that woman as seen through the male eye is just a sex object, that by which man knows himself at once as man and subject. MacKinnon further asserts that each element of gender stereotype is sexual: "Vulnerability means the appearance/reality of easy sexual access; passivity means receptivity and disabled resistance;...softness means impregnability by something hard" (MacKinnon 1989:118). It would not be out of place here to take an example from literature and to mention Coppelia Kahn's reading of Shakespeare's 'The Rape of Lucrece' as the poetic version of an ideology that justifies the male power. Ironically, the punishment for the raped woman, in canonical writings, has always been death or disappearance from the text for her body's transgression and humiliation, whereas for the rapist it is always understood as "man's reality," deriving from the assumption that men's sexual desire is natural and implicit. Thus the issues of male desire and male power coexist unproblematically. It is this oppressive power of what have been termed as "rape myths" that the women's voices have sought to explode by developing an individualistic selfhood, conscious of the possibilities of refashioning alternative modes of resistance.

I, therefore, propose to read two rape narratives, namely, Shashi Deshpandé's *The Binding Vine* (1992) and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) to examine the representation of and resistance to rape as offered by the implied author and the characters respectively. In the course of discussion, I shall juxtapose Anita Desai's depiction of the pathetic incident of rape and death in *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), Kamala Markandaya's treatment

of it in *A Handful of Rice* (1966), and the manifestation of female violence as a subversive act in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) to understand the changing perceptions of Indian women writers. Two powerful regional short stories—Mahasweta Devi's 'Draupadi' and Ambai's 'Black Horse Square'—would also be referred to in order to locate the tension between woman as the resistant subject and woman as a female; the effort is to establish a feminist paradigm by replacing experience with struggle. After examining the thematic patterns within which the rape narratives work, I shall reposition the texts within the culturally specific discourse and relocate the narratives within the space, time and resources of the specificity of feminism. Though the reality of Kalpana's rape is different from Manu's sadistic attacks on his wife (Saru, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*) and Sadashiv's obsessive love which is categorized as rape in marriage (Mira, *The Binding Vine*), what the women resist is the denial of right to their body, the violence done to the woman's person. As a matter of fact, women have been trained to choose silence in such matters, to ignore the indignity of the experience and to feign that all is normal. It is this unmentionable and the unspeakable that these novels are articulating.

Reading the rape texts as feminist critique enables a scholar-critic to recognize the power relations that marginalize the silent speaker. Focus on the narratives as forms of resistance to positioning makes it possible to locate the subversive ways in which women exercise their agency. Rape in the text may or may not be the central issue, but the fact that the author dares to expose and question the sexual politics, upsetting certain prohibitive norms, is the defining feature of the recent phase of feminism in Indian literature. That women have chosen to 'speak' rape is itself a kind of resistance, a "measure of liberation", as it shows the "shift from serving as the object of voyeuristic discourse to the occupation of a subject-position as master of narrative" (Sunder Rajan 1993: 78). Resistance to rape in Indian

English fiction by women though not fierce, has nonetheless, been significant because it has tried to question the commodification of women as bodies and their projection as mindless, mute sex objects that devalue their individuality and violate their dignity as humans.

While investigating the question of rape in the works of fiction under study, I wish to raise and answer several questions: how does the rhetoric of the texts mediate with the potentially subversive politics of rape and female resistance? How do rape, the narrative strategy and feminism overlap? How does the re-visioning of women's experience help us in re-conceptualizing women's world and how far fiction, which generalizes the specific has the power to give us satisfactory solution to the problem and how far can we believe in the fictive modes of resistance as real? Again, can creativity be read as a solution to the lived realities of a woman's life? When Shakutai declares, "Women like you [Urmi] will never understand what it is like for us" (148), she is voicing the stark reality of subaltern life, of class/caste difference that goes unnoticed in the generalized nature of women's struggle. Similarly, when Mira feels suffocated with her husband's proprietorial approach, the "sisterhood" is bewildered, unable to understand her trauma, falsifying the concept of "universal sisterhood" propounded by the Western feminists. Since the concept of sexuality is based on the paradigms of male supremacy, and on the concept of property rights, the factor like "force" or "without consent" appear redundant. Any critique of fictional narratives of rape or the problematic of nonconsent must take an all-inclusive view and read the intimidation of women in terms of the silencing of women, and women's resistance not only to the act but also to the very fact of rape, as portentous of social change. However, no ideological determinant can capture the traumatic experience enacted on the locale of the self and no language howsoever powerful is sufficient to express the felt experience of fear, degradation and physical and emotional

distress. The written text therefore, has its limitation and it is to be read in that light. Before analyzing the novels, it would be viable to give some thought to the question of rape as a social construct and its legal implications.

Simply and briefly, rape is an offence of violence. It is also violation of a woman's privacy; and since it is against her wish and will, it falls in the category of oppression and hence humiliation. Violence as such has no locus of action whereas violation targets the violated. Distinguishing between violence and violation, Robert Culbertson asserts that the former may simply be an experience but the latter becomes an epistemological stance whereby the self is threatened with assimilation:

The violence of a fistfight between two angry people and the experience of violence at the hands of an overwhelmingly powerful aggressor share some commonalities, including the possibility of injury and the relevance of context. But the experience of violation, violence from which there is no escape or recourse because one's body and one's repertoire of responses are quite simply overpowered from the outset, poses as central existential dilemma precisely because it is different, involving not a contesting hierarchy or power but its full, primary assertion, and the threatened, even actual dissolution of the self in the midst of it. (Culbertson 1995: 26).

Rape is a human rights issue also. The various UN commissions and conventions focusing on the status of women and their rights have from time to time asserted that rape is an offence of violence and as such it goes against the primary obligation laid down in the universal declaration of Human Rights because "violence impairs or nullifies women's enjoyment of human rights and freedom" (*Legal News and Views* 1993:132). The 84th *Law Commission Report*, 1980 regards it as the ultimate violation of the self; and clarifies that "it is a humiliating event in a woman's life which leads to fear of existence and a sense of powerlessness" (*Law Commission Report* 1980:1). Feminists call it "sexual invasion of the body by force" (Brownmiller 1969:376)

and “a violation of pride and dignity” (Guberman 1985:63), and Carole Sheffield uses a blanket term “sexual terrorism” for all forms of sexual violence—rape, wife battering, incest, pornography and harassment (Sheffield 1989:3). Literary artists are acutely aware of such victimizations and in their writings, particularly in fiction, women protagonists’ well being is jeopardized by such acts of “terrorism”—both violent and nonviolent intimidation. Of these, rape predominantly falls in the category of forced and nonconsensual sex. The common factors in these and various other definitions are that rape is not only violence but also violation; being a humiliating and traumatic experience, it is perceived as damaging to the ‘self’.

By positioning the experiences of rape in their culturally specific narratives, the female creative writers are seeking to challenge patriarchal ideologies, enabling their female protagonists to articulate their resistance within the social structure. *The Binding Vine* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* portray almost similar, though not identical problems. In the former, there are two incidents of rape—Mira’s rape in marriage and Kalpana’s ravishment by her relative—but these are reported in absentia with both the victims missing from the scene: Mira is long dead and Kalpana is nearly-dead being in a coma ever since. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, sadistic attack is construed as rape in marriage and is recounted from the consciousness of the protagonist-narrator, Saru, and is situated within the narrative so skillfully that it appears alternately as imaginary and real. The three rape cases are not central to the stories yet they are the prime events, and any attempt to segregate them from the main plot would mean damaging the structure. Apart from binding each narrative, the rape incidents provide the author with tools to focus on the responses of women to the traumatic sexual oppression and to deal with the question of female identity and selfhood in the face of the intense fear of self-annihilation. It may be mentioned here that Shashi Deshpande has dealt with

the theme of rape in marriage and the rape of a teenaged girl in two of her short stories also, 'Intrusion' and 'It was Dark', respectively.

II

The Binding Vine opens with Urmi grieving over the death of her girl-child, Anu and ends with the death of a young woman Sulu, traumatized by her husband's inhuman behaviour in raping her niece; in between lies the story of a woman's journey to the past, to the inner-most depths of her 'self' and thence to the experiences of women in the traditional patriarchal society. Thus, from the search for selfhood and personal volition the novel becomes a saga of the collective agony of women. The author undertakes a powerful reevaluation of conjugality and questions the male right over the female body. According to a critic Shashi Deshpande has challenged in this novel the "patriarchal, chauvinistic and indifferent Indian male role" (Sivaraman 1998: 132), through the story of Urmi, her discovery of her mother-in-law's diaries and the rape of Kalpana. The narrative technique is the first person autobiographical and the central consciousness is that of Urmi. In the course of the story, Urmi also explores the inter-personal relationships between Vaana-Harish, Inni-Akka, Urmi and Kishore, Mira and her husband, and above all Shakutai-Sulu and Urmi herself. Human relationship forms the basis of the novel and it substantiates Shashi Deshpande's views expressed in an interview:

Human relationship is what a writer is involved with. Person to person and person to society relationship—these are the two primary concerns of a creative writer and, to me, the former is of immense importance. My preoccupation is with interpersonal and human emotions (Deshpande 1998: 252).³

From Deshpande's own perspective and that of the novel, the two rape-cases sum up the no-win situation for a woman in

interpersonal relationships because of the pervasive and powerful discourse of gender. Women may resist the cultural discourse; nonetheless, they are unable to subvert the position.

The case in point is Mira's rape in marriage. Shashi Deshpande (the author), Urmi (the narrator-protagonist), and Mira (the resistant wife) all seem to problematize the question of woman's consent, the importance of saying an effective 'No' to the exploitation of woman's body for man's need, and the traumatic effect of enforced sex on woman's psyche. They also question the society's sanction to marital rape and the unequal relationship in which man, the 'subject' has every right to possess his wife, the 'object' as his proprietorial right. Thus, the culture tacitly permits the "infringement" of her rights and systematically denies her the opportunity to give her consent (Ouottara, Marian et al.1998: 27) ⁴.

It is this coercive cultural imposition that Mira questions in one of her poems:

"Don't tread paths barred to you
Obey, never utter a 'no'.
Submit and your life will be
a paradise, she said and blessed me"(83).

Mira, however, rejects her mother's advice to 'obey' and make her home a paradise because a self-affirming 'No' struggles to surface. Mira writes how the "no, growing painfully within like a monster child was born" (83). The process to resist the male authority, social sanction and female conditioning, is a "painful" one. Mira knows instinctively the difficulties of resisting victimization.

Urmi reads Mira's writings and recasts the woman who was different in many ways from the traditional/conditioned females of her time. She had the courage to counter her man, though he never seemed to pay heed to her. When Urmi's stepmother-in-law, Akka gives her the trunk containing Mira's books and

diaries, Urmi reads the material avidly and feels excited to see the woman come alive. “As if in opening the book, we had released a genie; she came alive, she was suddenly all about us—in the books with her notes scribbled all over, in the scraps of paper on which she had written words, lines in Kannada” (43). In her efforts to understand the deceased woman (Mira), Urmi also discovers the pain of another woman (Akka); the stoic Akka who breaks down and disturbs Urmi with a nagging question, “Why had she broken down now?” after so many years of enduring silence. Mira’s writings/poems/diaries give Mira an edge over Akka. Mira could articulate her pain, Akka could not, but then, is Akka’s ache lesser than Mira’s?

Akka reveals the scar of an unloved wife at an unguarded moment. Mira’s husband married Akka after Mira’s death but he could not get over Mira’s shadow and could never love his second wife, Akka. The entire gamut of Mira’s attractiveness, Sadashiv’s obsession, his efforts to possess her, the child-birth, Mira’s demise and her husband’s marriage to Akka to look after the child is so much steeped in the patriarchal lore that the women seem to have no space in it—neither Mira nor Akka. The story is simple: Mira’s (would-be) husband saw the eighteen-year-old Mira at a wedding, bubbling with youth. Crazy with her, he somehow managed to get his name suggested to Mira’s parents as a prospective groom and also prevailed upon his parents to fix the marriage. He acquired his bride but in the whole process, did Mira have a chance to give her consent, to dream, to be an individual? And also, where is the question of Akka’s ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the marriage? Both the loved and the unloved, like the beloved and the un-beloved queens of legends and myths, suffer the same lot—indignities—one because of the man’s obsessive love/lust, the other because of his cold calculated behavior. Whose pain do we consider unbearable—Akka’s or Mira’s? And yet, the author/Urmi valorizes Mira who had the courage to fight, to say the ‘no’ howsoever feeble, and Akka slides

into the background. It is when Akka sheds tears after years of silence that her helplessness suddenly stirs up questions in Urmi:

But it was not Mira I thought of when I looked at the trunk. She paled into insignificance before the woman who had so shocked us with her sudden bout of grief. Akka, who hadn't cried when her husband died, who has been stoical while Vaana sobbed like a child when she went to Bombay to study, who had been calm even when Vaana got married and went away—why had she broken down now? (48).

This query haunts Urmi and she realizes the importance of speaking out, of articulating. The foundation of the narrative that gets heard is laid on the silence of those who cannot articulate. It challenges the inverted representation of gender and becomes a powerful resistance strategy.

Not only the marriage was imposed on Mira, but it also turned out to be a one-sided affair. The man was tenacious and forced himself on her despite her dissent. After Mira's death in childbirth leaving her one-day old son, the family forced him to re-marry only to get a "mother for that motherless child." This is how Akka entered the scene. It was a great betrayal for her to know on the first day that her husband had married her to mother the child, Kishore. Akka was glad in a way to know the fact. "I knew then what to expect" (48) as an unwanted wife, the one brought home as an "object". Both the wives—Mira and Akka—were unhappy in marriage. Akka had nothing to look forward to and Mira dreaded the man's passion. In her poems Mira wonders if this has been woman's lot all through the ages; if Laxmi, the divine one was also frightened of the approaching night and the eroding of her privacy:

But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too,
twist brocade tassels around her fingers
and tremble, fearing the coming
of the dark-clouded, engulfing night? (56).

Mira's private fears and restlessness at the approach of the man are interspersed in her diary entries as well as in her poems. She feels smothered with his lustful act. She writes: "will I, suffocating cease to exist?" (65). That Mira was raped in marriage "runs through all her writing—a strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married" (63). Neither Mira's 'no', nor her cold, uncomplying attitude could deter the man. He could never understand, and least of all respect her wish. In fact, he as a male was never trained to acknowledge that woman too had wish or will. This situation validates what Susan B. Anthony expressed in the later half of the nineteenth century, "marriage has ever been a one-sided matter." Again, this reminds us of Kamala Das's revulsion at being entrapped by male lust: "I felt a revulsion for my womanliness. The weight of my breasts seemed to be crushing me. My private part was only a wound, the soul's wound showing through (Das 1977:110).

Though Mira repulsed and resisted her husband's passion, she had not deconstructed her femininity. She felt the joy of motherhood when life began to stir within her.

Tiny fish swimming in the ocean of my womb
my body thrills you;
Churning the ocean, shaking distant shores
you will emerge one day.(136).

The child awakens in the expectant mother "a desire for life," and Mira seems to be on the verge of life and death, joy and fear, hope and despair. Probably, hers is a case of what Showalter calls "divided-consciousness" of women conditioned by the patriarchal hegemony:

We are both the daughters of the male tradition, of our teachers, our professors, our dissertation advisers and our publishers—a tradition which asks us to be rational, marginal and graceful; and sisters in a new women's movement which engenders another kind of awareness and

commitment, which demands that we renounce the pseudo success of token womanhood, and the ironic masks of academic debate.” (Showalter 1986: 179)

Mira could not possibly have any recourse to feminist ideology or philosophy. She was not a feminist from the point of view of feminist activism of which we are aware today. In fact, her aversion to her man is the natural human resentment to domination. Urmi makes this point clear when answering Amrut’s question, “Do women want to be dominated?”

“No ... human being wants to be dominated. The most important need is to love. From the moment of our births, we struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves to this strange world we find ourselves in. Only when we love do we find this anchor. But love makes you vulnerable. Mira realized this; and she was afraid (37).

Two significant points come before us here: first, that devoid of love a relationship is meaningless, and second, love should not be a trap. Urmi experienced this on the day of her marriage when she saw fear in Kishore’s eyes. “The two of us in a closed room,” he said parodying the words of a popular film song, “and we can’t get out. That’s marriage” (137). At this moment Urmi had the courage to walk out of his room to prove him wrong and to make him realize that in their relationship, love would never be a trap. But in Mira’s relations with her husband, there was no question of freedom of self-determination. Mira resented the man because of his overbearing passion. She felt trapped, never enjoying the freedom of love or the right to her physical and sexual harmony.

They called me mad
they, who cocooned themselves
in bristly blankets
and thought themselves warm
when I spoke of my soul
That boiled and seethed. (100)

Further, it was sacrilegious for a woman to see rainbow colours, to dream, to have an inclination to admire beauty independently:

They called me mad
 They, who were entranced,
 by a single white ray of light
 when I spoke of the magic
 of the seven colours of a prism (120).

Patriarchal discourse invents ways and means to keep women in check and one of the ideological constructs is to assign them the onus of upholding the cultural heritage and thus marginalize them in the name of modesty and community's identity and honour. "Patriarchal hegemony is such that it does not rely on sexual violence alone to keep women in check. As feminists across the globe have demonstrated, one of the most successful ways in which women's sexuality was controlled and disciplined was by confining them within the home and interpellating them into predominantly subordinate and familial subject positions such as daughter, sister, wife and mother" (Jayawardena 1996: xix). Mira is instinctively aware of the suffocating patriarchal ideologies and social attitudes and she is sensitive enough to resist it.

However, Mira cannot hope to get any hearing because neither the society, nor the law takes cognizance of marital rape as a crime. Male domination and possession of woman's body in marriage is endorsed by the society as "normal" and no law has yet given any protection to the right of the woman to physical autonomy. Feminists in the West have often been sore over the sexual colonialism. Diana Wilson, a British feminist scholar contested once that rape laws "were not designed to protect a woman's right to physical or sexual autonomy but to preserve male rights of ownership in valuable property including sexual and reproductive property" (Wilson 1983: 69). Since it is intensely a personal and private matter, Mira's rhetoric remains hidden in her trunk as an individual cry against exploitation.

Shashi Deshpande has taken a serious view woman's right over her body in this novel as well as in the short story 'The Intrusion'. A first person narration from the point of view of the woman protagonist, the story shows the woman's fears from many angles: personal, familial, social. A newly wed couple reaches a seaside resort for their honeymoon. The woman seems to be under strange stress and unaccountable fears. Her first question to herself eloquently expresses her state of mind, "Why had we come her?" (Deshpande 1993: 34). She is nervous and irritated and wonders how she could be intimate with a man she does not know. She wants them to develop friendship, to know each other first before they unite as man and wife. Her unresponsive attitude angers him. In her turn, she is not ready to annoy him for fear of being discarded on the first night as "a frigid woman, incapable of love" (41). She visualizes the social stigma, "I imagined myself returning to my parents' home, shamed and rejected, and the consternation and grief it would cause there, my sisters' marriage held up forever, my parents disgraced—all because of me" (41). When the man finally forces himself on her, she feels the humiliation of "the intrusion into my privacy, the violation of my right to myself" (41). The choice either way is difficult for a woman. Her resistance and resentment may land her family in disgrace, damaging their social status, but on the other hand, her silence would mean erosion of her autonomy. The impossibility of disentangling the biological from the cultural contexts is entrenched in the very nature of patriarchy. Patriarchy cannot be generalized as a coherent system of oppression and domination; it is more complex and contradictory than is assumed. Feminists admit that though all heterosexual relationships are not disgusting, women are distressed for having no real right to determine the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives and are often frustrated for being overpowered by the male power. Summing up the anger and frustration women feel under such circumstances, Jasbir Jain stresses the need for the

self to be recognized, and observes, “Emotions are not absent in women, they, too, are thinking beings responsive to their experiences” (Jain 2004: 168). Shashi Deshpande knows the potential human value of relationships; she recognizes the importance of attachment women have for patriarchy—not only to their male partners but also to other male members of the family, society and community; far from visualizing separatism, she debates and challenges the abuse of power, not the relationship by itself.

Returning to *The Binding Vine*, we find Shashi Deshpande juxtaposing Kalpana’s rape along side Mira’s marital rape to emphasize the vulnerability of women. Mira failed to stop her husband’s invasion of her privacy despite her resistance; Kalpana falls a victim to the lust of her relative (who happens to be her Sulu Masi’s husband), precisely because she resists him, she says ‘no’ to his marriage proposal. His male ego cannot tolerate this audacity from a mere female. Mira’s husband exercises his male proprietorial rights over his wife; Kalpana’s molester exercises his male power over his victim. Kalpana defies the male self-image when she rejects the man, and asserts her will. How could a woman have her independent will to decide to marry another man when Sulu’s husband is one of the bidders? That Kalpana should have free will and independent existence is beyond the comprehension of patriarchal hegemony of which the man is a representative.

Significantly, both Shakutai (Kalpana’s mother) and Salu (Shakutai’s sister) are perpetrators of the patriarchal power game. Sulu wants Kalpana to marry her husband so that she (Sulu) could have a secure place in the household as a co-wife. Sulu is childless and is living under the constant dread of being thrown out if her husband brings another woman. The best would be, she thought, if he weds Kalpana. Sulu’s insecurity is revealed when in abject servility she falls at Kalpana’s feet, begging her to agree to marry her husband. “If Kalpu marries him, she can be mistress of the house, she doesn’t have to do anything, I’ll do

all the work, everything” (93), she tells Shakutai. Even Shakutai is not averse to the lucrative proposal. Sulu’s husband, according to Shakutai, has some plus points: first, since he loves Kalpana, he will take care of her; then, he is not a drunkard like her own husband i.e. Kalpana’s father. But, Shakutai realizes later that her assessment was wrong. What she called love, was lust. When the man learns that Kalpana is “getting married” to another man he “went crazy” (94), and finding an opportunity, he assaulted her, leaving the mutilated body to slide into coma. The man in his brutality shatters the life of three women—Kalpana who is struggling between life and death, Sulu who commits suicide on learning of her husband’s bestiality, and Shakutai who suffers not only the losses of her dear ones but also social stigma.

In reading *The Binding Vine* as a rape text, the significant question that crops up is: how far can we place the novel as a work of “female resistance” in the absence of a possible feminist agency to provide any “solution” to the problem. Moreover, there is only a veiled assertion of women’s sexual rights. The novel records the incidents after they have culminated in death or living-death (as in Kalpana’s case), besides it creates an imaginative space for the protagonist to reconcile with life’s *angst*. Urmila is more than the medium; she is the part of the whole scheme of the novel through whom Mira’s story and Kalpana’s rape assume significance. *The Binding Vine* has “three strands, the stories of three women: Kalpana, who is unconscious throughout; Mira, a poet who is now dead, and Urmila, who discovers Mira’s poems and also learns about Kalpana” (Interview 1998:250). Kalpana’s story is based on a real incident in which a nurse was raped. She was found unconscious and when Deshpande chanced upon the theme, the nurse was still in a state of coma and it was seventeen years then. It goes to the credit of Deshpande’s art that the rapes, the narrative and feminism coalesce in a significant way in the novel despite its different strands.

Between Mira’s story and Kalpana’s rape there lies a gap of four decades, if we were to piece together the scattered references in

the text. The author does not record the time when Mira was living, but it could well be the period in which women's higher education had become acceptable but not woman's freedom of thought. Marriage was the first priority and education continued only till marriage was fixed. The hold of tradition was unrelenting. Mira was tied down to the first man who proposed: a man who was not sensitive to her emotional needs, a man operating within the patriarchal power structure where not woman's will but woman's body was worth a thought. Mira records "I have learnt to say 'no' at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all. What is it he wants from me? I look at myself in the mirror and wonder, what is there in me?" (67). For Mira, living within the marriage was imperative. There was no question of walking out on the man for no socially viable reason. Mira learnt to resent his advances, as best she could, living within the marriage. The potent weapon of resistance with her was her ability to write.

By enabling Mira to write her thoughts and explore her inner spaces, Deshpande has empowered her; she has achieved a major breakthrough in feminist resistance by breaking Mira's silence. Mira consigns her intimate thoughts not only to her diaries, but she also expresses herself through creativity. Her poetry has therapeutic effect on her ruffled nerves.

Considering holocaust rape victims' efforts to recreate their annihilated "self" Susan J. Brison records how narrativisation of their stories help them regain their "personhood." Brison contends that the attempts to tell one's story reduce the effect of "body memory." "Fortunately, just as one can be reduced to an object through torture, one can become a human subject again through telling one's narrative to caring others who are able to listen" (Brison 1997: 25). Mira does not have listeners, nor does she expect to show her pieces to anybody lest she be ridiculed, but the very act of writing gives release to pent up feelings of anger, helplessness and humiliation. Urmi speculates if Mira, who was closer to her father ever speak "to her father about her marriage and did he pooh pooh her fears, laugh at her feelings"?

(64), possibly not. To reconstruct her individual identity, she expresses herself through her poetry. That she feels suffocated is manifest in her writing. Poetry becomes a release.

Mira shows remarkable ability to think independently. The process of questioning the cultural paradigms of female “will-lessness” that Mira began with may be new to her and unheard of in her time but in recent writings such bold steps are being taken by women poets such as Kamala Das and many others. Mira does not want to be will-less like her mother and other females. She instinctively knows the value of self-assertion and self-worth and has an inclination to reject self-effacement of the abject kind she notices in her mother: once during an astrologer’s visit all horoscopes were read except for the mother’s. Mira in her childlike curiosity asked, “Don’t you want to know your future?” to which her mother’s reply was, “what is there in my life apart from you all? If I know all of you are well and happy, I’m happy too.” Such self-effacement, such self-abnegation leaves Mira uncomfortable and she speculates, “Will I become that way too, indifferent to my own life, thinking it nothing? I don’t want to. I won’t ... No ... I’ll never think my life, myself nothing, never” (101). This thought is self-affirming. Elsewhere Mira writes, “To make myself in your image was never the goal I sought” (124). Urmi, too, does not want to “think back” through her mother and Kalpana, the raped teenager cannot identify with her mother’s ideas of femininity. In their rejection of their mothers, there is a metaphorical repudiation of the conditioned female and a simultaneous demonstration of an “insurgent consciousness”⁵ (Haynes 1991: 9). Forward-looking as these women are, they are constantly searching for their “self” and the female space. The concept of space denotes the freedom to “be” which is indicative of growth; it does not signify self-aggrandizement or aggression, or cringing and crouching in self-effacement. Catherine Stimpson sees space as a manifestation of a balanced and desirable condition and defines it as “a location in which to

roam, play, plant and settle; not in which to bluster and bully, or in response to cower and huddle” (Stimpson 1980: xvi). Mira’s quest for space leads her to reflect upon marriage, motherhood and the social networks of power that surround these institutions. Mira’s marital experiences constitute a classic case of the feminine mystique discovered and confronted, and her story represents a whole generation of middle class women.

When did Mira write? Urmi questions herself. She is aware that Mira’s family and society would have rejected her need to write as absurd. For Mira, writing is a basic urge and if she were denied it, she would also be deprived of the pleasure and the identity associated with writing. But she knows instinctively that to write her story would be to assert her independent self. By this act, she will not only incur the wrath of her husband, she will also violate the normative view of womanhood because her culture allows for only one story—the master’s story not her story.

Mira is aware, in a subtle way, of her identity. “I am Mira,” she asserts when her name is changed to ‘Nirmala’ after marriage as per the custom and in her assertion lies the urgency to reject a tradition and to refuse to be an object:

“Nirmala, they call, I stand statue still
Do you build the new without razing the old?
A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold
Can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira.” (101).

The implications of this exploration of identity are crucial for Mira. She is in a situation of double bind: she cannot submit to sexual imposition which tantamount to objectification, nor can she reject the marriage. Discussing the premise of resistance for gender ideology, Srimati Basu postulates that the idea of resistance has inherent in it the “bind between the inability to leave the situation one is in and yet a strong reluctance to accept the norms of that position” (Basu 2000: 187)⁶. Through the small, individual acts of “nay-saying” one may block patriarchal ideol-

ogies to an extent in which case resistance becomes a “survival strategy,” not an agency of change. Mira is circumscribed by her position, which is both traditionally binding and culturally exigent but she reiterates her ‘self’ by claiming her ‘subject’ position through writing. This is a potent symbol of resistance but how effective it is in Mira’s case is a significant postulate.

The all too significant question of woman’s right over her body comes from Urmi, years later. Apart from being a mediator between the past and the present, Urmi is also the alter ego of Shashi Deshpande. With sympathetic understanding of Mira’s problem and empathy with Shakutai, Urmi evolves what the feminist term sisterhood. But the foundation of the concept of sisterhood lies in the politics of gender and taking into consideration women’s relationship with men, which is emotional, and with the culture, which is historical and traditional, the proposition of women’s alliance in sisterhood becomes problematic. In Urmi’s wish to get Mira’s poems published, there lies her goodwill to give voice to the silenced woman, but then the entire exercise is fraught with dangers, the perils of hurting her own people, of jeopardizing her emotional ties with Vaana, Kishore and others, of damaging family honour. Urmi realizes the delicate situation she would be in, were she to persist with her plan. And yet she is sore that women never have had chance to express themselves, that the patriarchal culture has always ignored and devalued women’s experience, a wrong she wishes to correct now. “They never had a chance. It is not fair, it’s not fair at all,” she tells Vaana.

One of Mira’s diary-entries also highlights how men have always devalued women’s creativity. Years back she had shown her poems to Venu, the famous poet, and his stock reaction was, “why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men” (127). Mira was shocked at the peremptoriness of the male poet’s attitude. With the passage of time Venu becomes the renowned poet and Mira hides her

writings in her diary; Venu's poems are "every where and Mira's voice [is] silenced" (123). Reading this diary entry, Urmi reacts to the power politics of excluding women's writing, and reflects, "... we can't go on pushing" woman's experience, "under the carpet forever because we're afraid of disgrace" (174). She gears up to challenge Kishore and by-pass Vaana's appeal.

Urmi's enthusiasm is appreciable and theoretically viable; it is significant, too; nonetheless, let us take practical factors into consideration and ask Urmi if she would publicize her experience with her male friend, Dr. Bhaskar. Dr. Bhaskar construes Urmi's free and frank friendship with him as an indication of her unsatisfactory relations with her husband Kishore and reads in it a hint of her willingness to submit to him. Urmi reacts strongly, upbraids him and yet she keeps the experience to herself. Culturally, it is not easy to confess and publicize what she experiences; patriarchal structure also conditions women to let the private and the public remain segregated. The question of "honour" is far more delicate for women than it is for men.⁷ Despite this cultural exigency, we cannot underestimate women's efforts to speak up (and women poets today are writing outrageous confessional verses); creative writers are articulating women's side of experience and giving new insights crucial to gender and the politics of feminism.

Mira's poetic outbursts would provide a space for the demystification of patriarchal ideology and defy the male authority that subjugates the female. Mira's act of exposing the intimate details through her poetry and Urmi's decision to get it published speak of the feminist efforts to unsettle the authoritative structure and resist sexual victimization. Even in the Indian context, the efficacy of "woman-woman dyad" cannot be debated as is evidenced from the efforts of Indian feminists to bring the issues of sexual violence to light. The cases of Bhanwari Devi, Shah Bano and others got publicity and due attention when the Indian feminists clamored about these. Urmi cannot help Mira as an individual (now that she is no more), even if she publishes her

poems; moreover the novel does not evince if Urmi really goes ahead with her plan, but she can do her bit in Kalpana's case and here the story takes a turn.

Urmi's implication with Kalpana's case is personal; she lends Shakutai and her children moral and emotional support and gives the case a middle-class flavor, rejecting the subaltern fears of retaliation from the victimizer. Interestingly, the men who perpetuate atrocities—Mira's husband and Kalpana's molester (Prabhakar)—are absent from the site of the novel but they have left a trail of misery and the after effects of what they have done haunts the story. Of the men, Dr. Bhaskar and Kalpana's father have minor roles to play, they are more of spectators than alleviators. The source of strength and support for Shakutai and family comes from Urmi, Vaana and to an extent from Priti. Urmi's interest in Shakutai is more than the superficial interest shown in "such cases" by social service enthusiasts like Vaana. Urmi visits Kalpana in the hospital, consults the doctors, listens to Shakutai's version of the story and stands by her after Sulu's death. More than that, she doggedly persists in bringing the case to public notice. It is here that class/caste chasm comes to notice. Can Shakutai, a subaltern, stand being so exposed? Urmi looks at the case from her educated middle-class angle. She does not take into consideration the wide and almost unbridgeable class divide that makes the dialogue between an underprivileged woman and a privileged class woman a bleak possibility. The two standpoints are divergent: Urmi in defining the feminist aim to Shakutai is attempting to tell her what she is not conditioned to hear; Shakutai in explaining her position as a subaltern to Urmi is telling her what Urmi can only partially understand but cannot identify with. Shakutai's summing up has the advantage of practical knowledge of the subaltern condition. Her words are foreboding:

'The man,' she says after a small silence. 'What use is it blaming him? Women like you will never understand what it is like for us. We have

to keep our places, we can never step out. There are always people waiting to throw stones at us, our own people first of all. I warned Kalpana, but she would never listen to me. “I’m not afraid of anyone,” she used to say. That’s why this happened to her ...women must know fear.” (148).

As expected, Urmi encounters opposition from almost all quarters. Inni (Urmi’s mother), Vaana, Priti and others foresee trouble and warn her not to get involved in such a case. Dr Bhaskar comes out with the usual theory that may be Kalpana is a “professional”. The police officer argues “why make it case of rape, he asked? She’s going to die anyway, so what difference does it make whether, on paper, she dies the victim of an accident or a rape? We don’t like rape cases, the man said. They are messy and troublesome, never straightforward” (88). The important thing is not the woman’s misery but what the police officer likes or does not like. As an agent of patriarchal structure he is not much different in his callousness from Thomas Mathew in *The God of Small Things*. Unfortunately, even Vaana is not free from prejudice. After the report is published she asks Urmi, “Does it help the girl to be exposed like this?” To this Urmi’s acerbic reply is, “What do you mean exposed? ... You talk as if she’s the one who’s done wrong.” This is the crux of the matter. All those who learn of the case, including Shakutai throw the blame on Kalpana. Shakutai and Sulu think Kalpana invited trouble due to her modern living, with lipstick and gaudy clothes and her uninhibited ways, and also for not paying heed to sane advice coming from them both. The worst has been done and who pays the price? Kalpana. But both Urmi and the author are uncomfortable with the society’s verdict of honour and dishonour. They have a volley of questions. Can we really blame Kalpana for having a dream, for refusing to be a mistress and a co-wife, for defending herself when her uncle Prabhakar tried to molest her, for being lively and vivacious, for asserting herself? Expectedly, the women whose happiness he wrecks absolve Prabhakar.

Most of all resistance in the reverse comes from Shakutai who fears social ridicule and a bad name for the family. Afraid that her daughter Sandhya will never be able to get a husband, and scared of retaliation from her relatives, she desists from publicity. The best possible solution is to keep silent on the whole issue, she thinks pragmatically. Another reason for Shakutai's counter-resistance lies in her conventional attitude to patriarchy. Feminist critics opine that generally women do not like to resist or even recognize patriarchal ideology, although they may sometimes raise specific issues in their own interest. Considering resistance to demystification of patriarchal ideology Caroline Ramazanoglu traces several reasons why women do not view patriarchy in a wholly negative light, of which the most applicable in Shakutai's case pertains to her own disadvantageous positioning. Ramazanoglu observes:

...women are unlikely to be critical of patriarchal ideas and arrangements where men are so socially and economically disadvantaged that women feel little if any worse off than men. Resistance to the feminist demystification of patriarchal ideology also occurs where feminism is seen as the imposition of a dominant culture threatening to the traditions and customs of subordinate groups (Ramazanoglu 1989: 181).

Shakutai is wary of Urmi's ideas because she cannot subscribe to them. She does not want to land in further trouble and feels threatened by the new ideas of the dominant group: the educated urban middle-class.

Urmi gives out the details to a journalist friend and the rape case is reported giving rise to mixed reactions. Most people hold the girl responsible, and vent their venom on the women's lib, while women's groups muster all support and take out an angry demonstration. Victimhood provides the female subject with access to a sense of collective gender identity based upon a shared oppression. Such organized resistance offers them a chance to

get heard. The question of Kalpana's rape, which would have been hushed up, gets a new impetus. Questions are raised in the Assembly and the hospital authorities have to revise their order passed earlier to evacuate Kalpana from the hospital. Deshpande has astutely taken up the efficacy of resistance on two counts: woman's issue and the subaltern question. Thus she participates in the contemporary rethinking of history by highlighting textuality and story telling as inevitable frames through which all events are viewed. This is no small an achievement attained through solidarity of women despite class considerations.

Solidarity is a commitment to some kind of mutual support based upon the perception, by those who are solitary, that they share certain significant characteristics or that they are equal with respect to some social principle. This formulation is derived from Pizzoro, who points out that for an inferior status group, solidarity can be a double-edged sword. It constitutes a challenge to the existing social order. Pizzoro also opines that the subcultural products "have the potentiality of transforming failures into preferences and inferiority into pride" (Pizzoro 1970: 55). In real life situations also concentrated group efforts can offer strong resistance that can have the potential to bring change. Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita also demonstrate the advantages of unified struggle. "We struggle on alone. We have not yet discovered the strength that comes from struggling together. That strength can come only if we do not treat our problems as 'personal' or 'private'. By doing this we trivialize them. We have to realize that our personal problems are social and political problems. We have to politicize the personal" (Kishwar and Vanita 1999: 248).

In the fictional world, Shashi Deshpande offers resistance to rape and male sexual domination by representing the raped women as 'subjects'. Instead of structuring the narrative around the incidences of rape, she rewrites the rape text after the actual occurrence. Though the female selfhoods of the victims have

been annihilated by death or near-death, she makes the women visible by the manipulation of their gender identity. By locating the raped women at the intersection of the gendered violence and male power, she creates space between the moments of rebellion and total passivity to establish the efficacy of the visible struggles and to emphasize the presence of resistance in communal identity/subjectivity. Shashi Deshpande demystifies the concept of the narrative of romantic love, which glorifies the male love as violent and male sexual power as 'desire' by contextualizing woman's agency. Mira and Kalpana are separated by time as well as by class/caste divide but both are victims of the male power. In that, the author sees them collectively as a group: victims of gendered violence. Feminist criticism asserts that though "within the margin itself all women do not exist equally as class, caste, regional hierarchies remain in place. But in so far as they are all confined and suppressed by a patriarchal society in a certain 'womanhood' it is essential that we look at women collectively as a group which is acted upon rather than one which has the freedom of active agency, and is therefore relegated to the margins by the center" (Jayawardana and Alwis 1996:187).

Mira and Kalpana, as representatives of the victims of embodied violence, symbolically get their "freedom of active agency" when Urmi empowers them. Urmi exposes Kalpana's plight just as the novelist had reported the story of the raped nurse in *Femina*. Thus, giving voice to the voiceless becomes an effective tool of resistance both in reality and in fiction. That speaking out is important is illustrated by some of the reports published in *Manushi*. In one particular instance, an organized women's demonstration against dowry death cases in Delhi helped in mustering public opinion against the culprits. Students, teachers, working women, housewives and children, joined the demonstrators. "What was highly significant ... was that they (the demonstrators) were swelled by passers-by and by people coming out of their houses to join in.... The action of women was given

wide publicity in the press, on TV” (Manushi 1999:179). Urmi becomes more than a mediator; she is the active agent of change. Mira and Kalpana have left behind their histories; Urmi undertakes the task of making past present and also paves the distance between the past, present and future by giving representation to Kalpana. By privileging the subaltern and giving a “view from below,” she re-creates a sense of actual experience.

III

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Shashi Deshpande looks at rape from a different angle. Here, it is not “love/lust” that kills as in *The Binding Vine*; it is Manu’s sadistic attack that terrorizes Saru and kills her ‘self’. By textualising violence, power and dominance, Deshpande reveals the dynamics of power game, the confining constructs of femininity and the unquestionable male aggressions that are cultural constructs. That a qualified doctor, with a good name and a roaring practice should be reduced to a traumatized, defeated and helpless female object speaks of the formidable male sexual power that holds the woman captive of her own misery. The narrative pattern adroitly blends a double perspective—the present is recounted in third person narration and the past in first person—which serves a dual purpose, in that it helps us to know Saru’s story from her angle and also forge a link with her present in an objective way. Talking to Lakshmi Holmstrom, Shashi Deshpande elaborates how and why she chose to tell Saru’s story shifting from the third person to the first in alternate chapters:

The present is in the third person and the past in the first. I was doing it throughout in the first. But that’s often a perspective I use in my short stories. I wanted to be more objective. So then I tried it in the third. But it wouldn’t work at all. Yet I really needed to distance myself from the narrative in the present, otherwise it was going to

be far too intense. And then I read an American novel by Lisa Alther where she uses this method. And the minute I came across her novel I thought—let me admit it freely—Oh god, this is how I am going to do my novel (Interview 1998: 245).

In fact, Saru needs a story of her own. But in narrating that, she is overpowered and thwarted by her present and thus rendered helpless. If the first person narration is her “text” that wants to know where during the journey she lost her “self,” the third person point of view translates her efforts into the “master’s” text which suggests that she is psychologically sick due to her past experience; it speaks of her anxiety to be forgiven by her dead mother. While Saru’s story registers her resistance and revolt as a young girl/woman, the master’s text uncovers her inability to exert power and the restlessness born out of that inability. Here one sees Deshpande situating herself within the literary tradition of Indian feminism: her large and variegated narrative repertoires continuing to use the explicit sexual and violent language of resistance, and simultaneously the conditioned female non-confrontational response.

The novel begins with the narration of Saru’s nightmarish experience with Manu, which lands her, as well as the reader, in a kind of confusion to ascertain whether it is a fantasy or reality? Her husband violently attacks her at night and despite her resistance, he thrusts himself on her:

The hands became a body. Thrusting itself upon me. The familiarity of the sensation suddenly broke the shell of silent terror that had enclosed me. I emerged into the familiar world of rejection. My rejection that had become so drearily routine. I struggled to utter the usual words of protest, to say... No, not now, stop it. But the words were strangled in my throat. The face above mine was the face of a stranger. Blank, set and rigid, it was a face I had never seen. A man I did not know (11).

Manu’s violence scares Saru. Not that she rejects her husband at the outset, as Mira did; in fact, after their marriage Saru had enjoyed physical intimacy with Manu, but his recent sadism is

beyond her comprehension and endurance. Saru is a nervous wreck fighting her past and resisting her present. She contemplates divorce but she cannot take such an extreme step for two reasons: it will have an adverse effect on her children, and secondly, divorce would mean disgracing herself. Her imaginary conversation with a lawyer shows that the law would not help her in her case:

Can I divorce my husband?
 Any reasons?
 He's cruel?
 How? Will you be specific. Please give details (97.)

At this point Saru backs out. "Bed, the one she shared with her husband, was to her an intensely private place. She could not, would not, draw aside the curtain that hid it from the world" (97). Besides, she does not want to hurt her children—Abhi and Renu, by any false step.

Culturally and socially conditioned, Saru becomes a sexual trauma victim. Her home becomes the dreaded place, and the approach of night a terror. For all outside appearances, the couple has an ideal life like the ones in "T.V. ads." but there is a "skeleton" in the cupboard that keeps on haunting Saru. Saru is a doctor and her husband a professor. Herein is embedded the core of their problem. As a woman, she is supposed to be inferior to her man. The male ego does not tolerate that the wife should have a superior status. Anita Desai uses the metaphor of woman compulsorily walking "four steps" behind her husband, denoting his supremacy and her subservience. The basic problem is revealed when Saru tells her father about her shattered relations with Manu. Her father is astonished when she tells him that she is scared of her husband. She recounts that the problem started when a girl who once came to interview Saru, the renowned doctor, had asked Manu, "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?" (200). That night Manohar (Manu) "attacked me like an animal.... I was

sleeping and I woke up and there was this.... this man hurting me. With his hands, his teeth, his whole body” (201). After that, the relations never normalized. Saru cannot even talk it out with Manu because he is so normal the next morning that were it not for the bruises on her body, Saru too would have thought that she was fantasizing.

Sexual politics works in a devious manner in the novel. As a man, Manu must hold power; and because the social order deems power as synonymous with superiority, he resents his lower status as a professor as against his wife’s superior social status as a doctor. And since the only way to assert his control over her is through sexual power, he exercises his mastery by violence and aggression. What Kate Millet says about male political dominance as laid down by the ideology of Western culture can well be applied to the Indian patriarchal hegemony:

A disinterested examination of our system of sexual relationship must point out that the situation between sexes now, and throughout history, is a case of that phenomenon Max Weber defined as *herrschaft*, a relationship of dominance and subordination. What goes largely unexamined... is the birth right priority whereby males rule females. Through this system a most ingenious form of “interior colonization” has been achieved. It is one which tends moreover to be sturdier than any form of segregation, and more rigorous than any class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring. However muted its present appearance may be, sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power (Millet 1970: 24-25).

Manohar’s approach to marriage and woman’s space within it is both modern and feudal. He welcomes his wife’s money and position so far as it ensures for him and the children a comfortable, rather a luxurious modern life; but, he revolts when his superiority as a male stands on uncertain grounds. He reacts sharply to Saru’s suggestion to give up her practice and be a whole time housewife. “And how will we live?” is a big question

he places before her. “On my salary? Come on, Saru, don’t be silly. You know how much I earn. You think we can live this way on that?” It may be granted that Manu is unaware of his sadism but how does that absolve him of the sexual victimization of his wife? Saru understands his problem. “It is because I am something more than his wife that he has become what he is” (78) but again, that is of no help. The matter becomes more complicated as Manu does not know the reason behind her ‘sudden’ decision to quit practising and Saru does not muster up words to make known to him his unconscious.

Significantly, Shashi Deshpande develops a unique view of the unconscious in which she rewrites a crucial aspect of psychoanalytic theory revealing what the Neo-Freudians like Karen Horney called the specific cultural and social aspects that bear upon the psyche. Written with acute psychological insight, the novel re-contextualizes the problem of woman’s devaluation. Saru, the spirited girl who revolted once against the patriarchal power structure by challenging her mother, is now unable, as a married woman, to accept her situation and explore her ‘self’. Self-berating saps much of her energy as she often blames herself for the problems, “It’s because I wronged her that I’m suffering now. And, the more I suffer, the greater the chance, perhaps of my expiating that wrong.” (204). She remembers the tragedy of her brother’s drowning that led to all the problems later:

If only I hadn’t gone there that day...
 If only he hadn’t come with me ...
 If only I hadn’t left him alone... (184)

To her father’s query if Saru was scared of Manu, she categorically says: “Scared of him? O god, yes. But not the way you think. It’s not what he’s done to me, but what I’ve done to him” (216).

Saru finds the easiest way to resist Manu. Under the pretext of visiting her father after her mother’s death she goes away, secretly resolving never to return. Even at the last moment of her

departure, she cannot tell him the real reason behind her going away. It is only after talking it over with her father (Baba) that she feels relieved. His words “Don’t turn you back on things again. Turn round and look at them. Meet him” (218), make her aware of her earlier mistake. One need not run away from life’s problems, one has to resist them meeting them face-to-face. In life “there can never be any forgiveness. Never any atonement. My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood” (217). Introspection leads Saru to accept her various divided “selves” and to join them with her real “self”. She decides to take her life in her own hands:

My life is my own ... somehow she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link. It means you are not just a strutting, grimacing puppet, standing futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness. If I have been a puppet it is because I made myself one. I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of proving my mother right (220).

Once she resolves to face Manu and resist his authority openly, Saru feels relieved. Her words, “Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait. I’ll be back as soon as I can” (221) are meaningful; she has found her voice, her voice to offer him resistance, to fling facts on his face. The open ending of the novel leaves scope to interpret it in different ways, but as Shashi Deshpande affirms, Saru is not going back (Interview 1998: 247).

An inquiry into a number of earlier works of fiction by Indian women in which rape has either been depicted or referred to, will enable us to explore the emancipatory areas for women in India, and investigate the pioneering efforts of the writers in recognizing entrenched patriarchal power. The climate permitting and encouraging resistance seems to have been generated with the impact of the Western critique of the importance of

identifying textual /sexual politics, the emphasis on gender identity and the assertion of female “self” as an autonomous entity. There is continuity in women’s experiences suggested by the faintly noticeable feminist consciousness in the earlier writers and the recent more overt trends in giving that consciousness a credible intellectual form. In Kamala Markandaya’s *A Handful of Rice*, Ravi, the protagonist rapes Jayamma, his mother-in-law in a mad moment of rage. On not finding his wife Nalini home, he suspects Jayamma of having sent her into hiding to punish him for his earlier rotten mood and the ensuing quarrel. Enraged, he frets:

Gone off, not a word, leaving him with his troubles. Forgetting the duties she owed him, the duties of a wife to her husband. This was where she should be now—here, beside him when he wanted her, not where her fancy took her. Where was she now? Bitch, he said, bitch (221).

He comes down to ask Jayamma about Nalini, but when she denies knowledge, he vents his anger on her. Laughing wickedly he pounces on her, “You’ve wanted it for months, for years. All the time you lay with your husband. Every time you looked at me” (221). He ravages her body but after the moment’s madness, Ravi is contrite, unable to face her. Strangely, Jayamma seems to have no resentment. Even the author does not show any resistance to the episode.

The representation of rape in this novel is short and quick. It is not relevant to the plot and has no long-term effect either on the text or on the psyche of the character. It does not even leave its impact on the reader except unease for the incestuous act. However, the fact that writing in the early 50s and 60s Markandaya should so boldly depict rape shows the daring steps the Indian women fiction writers had started taking. Jayamma’s acceptance of the incidence speaks of the writer’s assertion of female “desire.” Ravi’s rage displays the exertion of his male pow-

er, and though the author does not overtly decry male superior authority, she covertly hints at its formidable subjugating force.

Anita Desai's *Fire On the Mountain* has an incident of rape, reported briefly. Ila Das is murdered and then raped savagely by Preet Singh, punishing her for interfering in his affairs. The murder scene is more elaborately drawn than rape scene. After strangling her, in blind rage Preet Singh "tears off her clothes, and comes to the dry, shrivelled, starved stick inside the wrapping, and raped her, pinned her down into dust and the goat droppings, and raped her" (143). By placing Ila Das's rape at the end of the narrative, the author follows the canonical male texts in which the raped woman ends in death. Whether the man is caught and punished is not significant for the text, what is of importance is the annihilation of the 'self', and the faint glimpse of gendered identity in which one woman's destruction is viewed as another woman's end. Ila Das's violation is by implication the violation of Nanda Kaul. Ila Das is punished for propagating social reforms. Any resistance to male authority is apprehended as a challenge to male superiority for which the punishment is silencing the woman through sexual violence; the punishment is a lesson and a warning to them to keep within the traditional bounds.

A marked change in woman's response to rape is discernible in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*. Jyoti Vih, a young widow, travelling alone, on an illegal passport, from the Punjab (India) to the U.S.A. is subjected to violation. Taking advantage of her condition—she is alone, defenceless and an illegal traveller—the Half-Face rapes her after their landing on the Florida shores. For him, it is a simple bargain: "I'm your meal ticket outthere. Give me any grief and you're dead meat" (115). Despite her appeals, he forces himself on her. Angry, helpless and distraught, Jyoti stabs him to death. Before killing him, she slices her tongue and with blood dripping from it, she strikes him with the knife repeatedly.

It is significant to note that instead of killing herself to "balance my defilement with my death" (117) Jyoti Vih decides to

wreak vengeance on the man. Like Goddess Kali, she towers over the man “with my mouth open, pouring blood, my red tongue out” (118), and stabs him to death. After the violent act, Jyoti burns her suit case with her “dishonored old clothes,” symbolically purifies herself, discards her old identity and walks out of her old self to her freedom to become the new woman—bold, uninhibited, unconventional. As a critic points out, “By making her heroine triumph over widowhood and by depicting her opting for a fate different from what seemed to be in store for her sisters, Mukherjee is making a kind of feminist statement in the novel: women can make a difference in their lives even if they cannot cheat fate completely” (Fakrul 1996:115). Jasmine alias Jyoti knows that life back home was also not secure for a woman and women stuck together when out in the fields to ward off “rape, ruin, shame” (*Jasmine* 55). When Prakash was alive, he had told her the significance of resisting demands on her body until she was ready to meet them. Jyoti follows her dead husband’s instructions to their uttermost end and resists with a violent response.

Though the rape is literally represented in the text in first person narration, it does not make much impact—first because of the limits imposed by language and second, because of its placement somewhere in the middle of the narration. Feminists also observe that usually it is not possible to write rape due to the limits of the language. Moreover, in *Jasmine* the rape is depicted when Jyoti is almost comfortable in her new surroundings and as such the incident does not seem to affect her psyche. It hardly ever recurs in her consciousness; it does not seem to have left any scar on her. It does not assume central importance to the story. Thus in denying victim status to Jyoti/Jasmine, the author subverts the sexual politics and de-constructs the male authority. However authentic the account of rape may be, the murder scene and Jyoti’s subsequent walking out of the motel nonchalantly, unseen and unchallenged after the murder is unrealistic. But then, the novel, the author tells us, is not meant to be realistic.

It is “a fable” (Fakrul 1996:117) a statement that absolves the author of much of the responsibility. From the feminist angle, one can see the continuity of women’s experiences when one woman’s rape is avenged by another woman. Let us look at the murder of Ila Das and the murder of Half-face. If the male in *Fire on the Mountain* strangles a woman, it is a woman in Jasmine who in an equally gruesome act stabs her violator.

Mention may be made here of some earlier Indian male writers who, in order to keep intact the purity of their heroine have desisted from letting them fall a prey to male lust. Somehow, the *Dieu ex machina* works. Mulk Raj Anand’s Gauri in *Gauri* is saved from Dr. Batra’s trap by the timely intervention of Dr. Mahendra. In *The Painter of Signs*, R.K. Narayan presents a comic picture when Daisy climbs up a tamarind tree sensing Raman’s wicked intentions. Women writers, on the contrary, in exploring and boldly depicting the victimisation of women are raising their voice against sexual exploitation, and by writing the body are asserting the need for female autonomy and resistance to male power.

A courageous representation of rape and powerful resistance to it that merits special reference comes from Mahasweta Devi. In her short story ‘Draupadi’, the Santhal Naxalite protagonist Dopdi is punished for her resurgent activities by a gang rape. The next morning when she is summoned to the Senanaryak’s tent, she disrobes herself, and standing naked defiantly in front of the Senakayak, she shames the Senanayak’s manhood with her spiteful question: “Are you a man?” In Ambai’s short story “Black Square Horse” Abhilasha shares Rosa’s subjective experience of rape by identification with her through body language. In Black American fiction powerful rape narratives resist patriarchy through spontaneous rebellion. Gloria Naylor’s *Women of Brewster Place* and Ann Petry’s *The Street* are revenge narratives where the raped women crush the men to pulp in anger and frustration.

The three rape cases in Deshpande's novels discussed here, illustrate the difficulty in reading resistance to rape. Kalpana as the subaltern woman is silenced and those who could speak for her, like her mother or father, have no will to articulate. For Shakutai, the computation is simple: it is man's world, and man's culture in which sanity lies in submitting mutely to his decree. Mira can voice her case but the society does not see her as a rape victim. Saru revolts but the man is not aware of her problem, nor of his own sadistic drives. Judged individually, the men are not vicious. Manohar is a victim of the cultural construct, Mira's husband does not know where love ends and lust begins, and Kalpana's assailant is blinded by male desire. Whatever their reasons, the sufferer ultimately is the female. For this reason it is exigent to speak, to expose, and to shout. Mira achieves this to an extent through her creativity, Saru resists by retreating, and Kalpana has a savior in Urmi. The main resistance comes from the author, however. It is powerful in itself but simultaneously powerless because by then the act is done and retrieval is not possible. In Akka's case the sexual repression works in the reverse—her body is the site of the humiliation flung at it through rejection. She is used—as a wife—to satisfy her man and as a mother to nurture Kishore. Between her two roles Akka is lost.

The situations explored in Deshpande's rape narratives are encoded within the Indian cultural paradigms. In probing the intimate experiences of her female protagonists and representing them with unusual frankness, she offers a strong resistance to the notion of female modesty, rejects the issue of prudery, and subverts the male cultural norms. The best way to resist rape is to break the silence. Resistance or nonconsent is difficult to prove is a court of law but social anger can be a potent weapon to forestall any further violence. Meera's story has the potential to be heard or read; it can become an issue. Akka's story, equally poignant, is silenced as Akka lacks voice. The novelist ensures for her women 'subjectivity' without allowing them to "slam the

door.” Mira gives voice to her intimate experiences and Saru tells her father of her plight candidly. This is a major break through for the Indian woman in her attempt to construct her identity. What Deshpande accomplishes in these novels is far-reaching and visionary if one were to place them in the context of their reception by the reader: the recognition of the feminist discourse in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and the anger directed at the author for writing pornography in *The Binding Vine*. Alerting us to the fatal and traumatic ramifications of sexual violence in the family and society, Deshpande warns that these social and cultural constructs stymie human intimacy and personal growth, which inevitably thwart political action. Like Urmi who wishes to publish Mira’s poems and who musters social and political support for Kalpana, Deshpande supports the need for a new language; an alternative idiom to express the subjective experiences and a new vocabulary to give representation to women’s struggle and to make their silence heard. The logical social anger of the female can develop the resistant perspective.

Notes

1. Freud theorized “gaze” in terms of voyeurism and exhibitionism. He conceived of it as the male prerogative to gaze the female body to derive pleasure. Feminists object to such fetishization of the female body. They counter the male view and feel that the drive to look is an important part in man’s quest for mastery over the world and reject it as a monolithic view. They propound the possibility of a “female gaze.” For further discussion on this aspect see Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Suversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney and London: Allen & Unwin, 1989); Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is Not One*. Trans. Chathrine Poter with Caroline Burke (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985); Janet Woolf, *Feminine Sentences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990)
2. In her article ‘Consent, Agency and Rhetoric of Incitement’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 1, 1993, 867-882 Kumkum Sangari discusses the problematic of woman’s agency or transformative capacity. This

article discusses how the consensual, contractual elements combine agential power with subjection of women and produce a mixture of consent and resentment.

3. See *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, ed. R.S.Pathak (Creative Books, 1998). This anthology has an appendix containing following interviews:
 “A Woman’s World... All the Way,” with Vanamala Viswanathan, 232-7;
 “There’s No Looking Back,” with M.D.Riti 238-41;
 “Shashi Deshpande talks to Lakshmi Holmstrom,” 242-50;
 “Denying the Otherness,” with Geetha Gangadharan: 251-55
 “In Conversation with Shashi Deshpande,” Vimala Rao: 256-59.
 [Extracts wherever used from these are indicated in parenthesis as “interview” and demarcated by page numbers.]
- 4 See Mariam Ouattara, Purna Sen, and Marilyn Thomson. “Forced Marriage, Forced Sex: The Perils of Childhood for Girls.” A new inter-agency group, the Forum on the Rights of Girls and Women in Marriage, has been formed to investigate how early marriage, non-consensual marriage, and rape within marriage affect girls and women. Comparing case studies from Nepal, West Africa, and India, the authors focus on the legal, social, and health implications of early and non-consensual marriage and point to the need to investigate and advocate for legislative and policy approaches to tackle non-consensual sex as well as servile and slave-like conditions of marriage.
- 5 Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash use this term while discussing the everydayness of subaltern resistance to subjectivity in power relations. See *Contesting Power*. Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991:9.
6. See “Srimati Basu, “The Bleeding Edge: Resistance as Strength or Paralysis,” *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*. July-December 2000. Basu places Ashapura Devi’s Bangla novel *Pratham Pratishruti* in its cultural context and looks at the feminist concept of resistance to examine the representation of resistance in literary texts. She asks a significant question if the moments of resistance are liberating or they are merely the celebration of some small moments of nay-saying and concludes that individual acts of resistance can be classed as “unavoidable survival strategy,” through which “women may block patriarchal ideologies,” but they cannot bring about institutional changes (185-202).

7. Discussion on the question of man's "honour" as against woman's oppression appears in chapter 2 of this study.

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Seven

Resistance from the Margins— Mukhtar Mai and Bama

An act of writing is to discover and to make heard silenced voices;
and an ethic of reading is to hear those voices.

—MARK LEDBETTER

But now,
Should anyone happen to ask,
I tell them readily:
Yes, I am a pariah girl.

—SUKIRTHARANI (Tamil Dalit poet)

In recent literary debates over the canonical ideologies and reactions against the oppressive cultures, the questions of absent centers in the writings from the margins have assumed special significance. Voices from the margins like those of the women, the tribals, the Dalits, the minorities and other oppressed sections of the society are providing powerful literary representation to the cultural ideologies experienced at different levels. In that these can be subsumed broadly under three predominant ideologies of the contemporary literary scene—feminism, post-colonialism and postmodernism. Not mutually exclusive, these ideologies are connected by the “voice” the authors use to critique the hegemony. Often the language used is of the hegemonic culture they critique but that gives the writers a platform or a space to “write back” to the “empire” whether the empire

manifests itself as imperialism in relation to the postcolonial situation, or as patriarchy in relation to feminism or the power structures vis-à-vis ethnicity. Despite the obvious differences in their personal positions, locations and situations, their writings have unity to some extent as they attempt to deconstruct the relationship between hegemonic power and the powerless “other” and to redefine themselves. The process of deconstruction and redefinition entail questioning and challenging the old stereotypes leading to the construction of new approaches within the existing paradigms. It is here that resistance discourse comes in as an alternative strategy to interrogate the power-structures and assert one’s presence.

The present chapter seeks to explore two self-narratives: Bama’s autobiography *Karukku* (2000/2012) and Mukhtar Mai’s memoir *In the Name of Honour* (2006) to understand the significance of ‘voice’ in a work of art. These works are not homogenous in that they belong to different sections of the contemporary Indian/Pakistani societies but they share certain commonalities: first, being translated works they have layered and multiple locations that give different shades of meaning to resistance strategies; and second, they come from the underprivileged sections of the two societies—Mukhtar Mai is a Gujar tribal from the bordering village of Pakistan; Bama is a Tamil Dalit—facts that make a strong case for problematizing these resistance strategies. Together, these self-narratives are about a callous system, their victims who have learnt to raise their voice and also about their determined efforts to counter the age-old system by refusing to accept the given. In *Theorizing Resistance*, Jasbir Jain points out that resistance is required for the act of living and is “necessary for history to evolve and for policies to introspect. It connects our everyday life with larger concerns of power and globalization” (Jain 2012:xvi). When restrictions, religious traditions, censorship, exile or imprisonment try to silence the voices of the non-conformists, reaction to the im-

position begins with small acts of protest, propaganda, criticism and dissent that can be termed as resistance. This is a battle, Jain opines, for human values to survive, an effort to “clear the cobwebs which prevent us from understanding the nature of reality” and a struggle to address the blindness of power (Jain xvi). The texts taken here for discussion do not claim to be feminist texts; they suggest the women’s struggle for survival in a hostile world of patriarchy—raising voice against rape and injustice of the male-oriented justice system (Mukhtar Mai), and breaking free from the restrictions of her Dalit identity (Bama). In telling their life stories, these women assert to carve out a unique personal space for themselves and shift the gaze to the centre.

Let us first conceptualize resistance so as to ascertain how it can be proletarianized in examining Mukhtar Mai’s Memoirs *In the Name of Honour*. There are three layers on which our analysis can be based: cultural practice of honour rape, subaltern status of the subject (Mukhtar Mai), and the dominant position of patriarchal structure that leaves no space for women. That Mukhtar Mai should contest the strangleholds of power and succeed in carving out a space for herself, albeit after harrowing struggle, highlights the effectiveness of resistance that can disrupt and fracture the prevailing forms of power. It is made possible because Mukhtar Mai showed the courage to speak out. Usually, when the subaltern speaks and contests power, the dominant groups consolidate their control to counter the anti-hegemonic discourse which gives rise to an elite-subaltern conflict. Mukhtar Mai’s struggle was not without its fallouts—she was threatened, the Gujars were intimidated, her family was ostracized by the villagers and the male members of her family tried to dissuade her from pursuing the case. Mukhtar Mai’s case, though episodic in character in the beginning, captured international media attention and consequently, hegemonic powers became wary. Indeed, Mukhtaran Bibi’s story is saddening; it evokes our sympathy and anger, but the book requires to be assessed

as a translation of translation to understand its basic value as a piece of literature because in order to understand resistance in literature, it is necessary to take into account the narrative strategy used to project resistance which in a literary work may be muted and muffled. A literary critique has to delve deep to spot it and assess its socio-cultural implication.

In the Name of Honour is Mukhtar Bibi's story of rape and its aftermath. There is probably nothing new in her account which can be summed up thus: Mukhtaran Bibi, born in 1972 in Meerwala, a small tribal village in Jatoi Tehsil of Muzaffarabad District of Pakistan, belongs to the Tatla clan—an impoverished and marginalized Gujar tribe. The rich and powerful Mastoi clan forms the other part of the village. The chief of their clan wants Mukhtaran, a divorcee, to be married to one of their sons but when Mukhtaran's father and uncle dilly-dally; the Mastois plot revenge, implicate Mukhtaran's twelve year old brother, Shakur, in an imaginary offence, threaten to kill him unless Mukhtaran comes to the Jigra (village Panchayat) to apologize on his behalf. Pitted against the powerful Mastois, the Gujars have no option but to obey their command. This reality of their situation recoiled on the blameless and hapless Mukhtaran when in June 2002 she was gang-raped in full view her parents and the entire village, and paraded half-naked. Her crime? Only that she happened to be a marginalized woman—not only because she is the daughter of the poor Gujars but also because she is a divorcee, someone fit to be slighted.

Mukhtaran Bibi's sad but daring story has been put in words by Marie-Therese Cuny, an activist and writer from France, as a first person narrative. The publisher's 'A Note to the Reader' makes it clear that Mukhtaran Bibi speaks only Saraiki dialect and she "can read or write no other language." Mustafa Baloch and Saif Khan helped in translating the conversation between Mukhtaran and Cuny and "Marie-Therese Cuny transformed Mukhtaran's thoughts, emotions and impressions into the book,

despite the hurdle posed by the great disparity of language". The book is in French and the French version has been translated in English by Linda Coverdale and published by Philippe Robinet.

At this point, let us glance at the layers of translation: (i) Mukhtaran speaks in Saikia dialect; (ii) it is translated into French orally; (iii) Cuny, the writer picks up the oral version and writes it down; (iv) Cuny translates Mukhtaran's emotions and sentiments via the two men translators; (v) her book is then translated in English. In the process how much of Mukhtaran's original thoughts come directly to us? Whose ideas come to us (readers) Mukhtaran's or the author's or the translator's? It is often accepted that translation requires some measure of "faithfulness". But then whom should it be faithful to—to the text or to the author or to the reader? There is another point: translation also calls for a certain amount of creative freedom to make it readable otherwise it addresses only the surface meaning missing out on core or quintessence. In Mukhtaran's book one may sometimes wonder if the sentiments are Mukhtaran's or the author's. But, the text conveys the essence and the strong urge to resist power, established cultural norms and injustice. Herein lies the success of the work and Mukhtaran's resistance.

One more point needs to be discussed here. Marie-Therese Cuny and Philippe Robinet are white feminists from the First world; Mukhtaran belongs to a remote tribal village of Pakistan. Can these women pave the difference to appreciate the ethnic view-point? Recently feminists have been contending that differences can be silenced by discussions. By understanding women's positions in their respective cultures, a meaningful and unified feminism would be possible if instead of "passive immersion" in each other's cultures they strive to understand each other's "voice". Only then a mutual dialogue is possible, a dialogue that does not reduce women to abstraction called "woman". That Mukhtaran and Cuny have been able to articulate their

experiences, they have refused to be silenced, and they have been heard is comparable to the feminist strategies of sharing and bonding. Articulation of experiences, it is contended, is the hall-mark of a self-determining community or individual.

The cultural practice of honour rape and its acceptance in the patriarchal system form the basis of *In the Name of Honour*. In patriarchal discourse, the notion of community's identity rests on the modesty of women and any violation thereof becomes a denominator of the shame of the weaker community and the reaffirmation of the rival community's power. By a curious logic of patriarchy, women have since ages been the upholders of man's—and by implication—community's honour: be it Sita or Draupadi, Amba or Ahilya, and more recently, Gudiya or Mukhtaran Bibi. Women not only have the onus to safeguard it but they are the ones to bear the brunt of the rival community's vengeance; and conversely, they become the symbol of their community's rape and dishonour. It becomes a constant reminder to the men folk of the aggressor's position of power and his assertion of that power.

Discussing the specific trends in the communal violence during partition, Kumari Jayawardena and Malalithi de Alwis observe in their 'Introduction' to *Embodied Violence* that taking revenge on the 'Other' community's men by violating their women is a common practice during communal violence (1996: xvii).² Further in the same book Kalpana Kannabiran, in her paper "Rape and the Construction of Communal Identity" focuses on the two ways in which community identity is established and asserted: one is rape of the 'Other' community's women; and the second is allegations of rape or aggression leveled by the dominant community against the 'Other' community. Rape signifies the rape of the other community as a whole and the allegations serve to create "a condition for the total refusal of safeguards—constitutional or otherwise—for women" of the

weak community (1996:33). The former entails direct revenge and the latter gives the stronger community an excuse to take revenge. Either way the weaker community is made to suffer in such a “culture of power.”³

Mukhtaran Bibi’s case falls within the same parameters as discussed by Kannabiran—first, allegations against her brother and then rape of Mukhtaran to prove the weak community guilty, and also to assert the strong community’s power. Mukhtaran Bibi’s book, *In the Name of Honour: A Memoir* is an exposition of how in the patriarchal hegemonic structure the concept of honour and identity rests on women and how through them the community is punished. That is not all; punishment is also a warning to women that no compromise with *izzat* would be tolerated. As Shaila Shah points out, “Violence, and the right to use it is sanctioned, the so-called crimes of honour being designed to keep a woman in her place: silenced, mutilated or even destroyed” (1988:284).

However, as we read on, our focus shifts from punishment and pain to the triumph of “voice” that the memoir portrays. This is not, however, to deny the magnitude of Mukhtaran’s trauma but to privilege her subject position so as to authenticate the power of “speech” and to affirm that marginality does not require the usual over-valorization which hinders human growth. Resistance discourse in itself is humanistic in nature; it interrogates the authenticity of hegemonic power structure and raises voice for human freedom. As Mukhtaran challenges power raising her voice fearlessly, wants punishment for the criminals, and decides to break some of the norms of her culture, she is out to break stereotypes and the passivity of her culture towards injustice. The process to understand her own voice, to question and assess her role in her own culture has resulted in assigning meaning to her experiences for other women. Mukhtaran Bibi breaks her silence but breaking the silence has its severe repercussions which she has to face; the public/private dichotomy is blurred as soon as

her story becomes public. The media helps her get global attention; that is one significant point going her favor which enables her to muster up her courage to offer resistance to the accepted paradigms and deflate the agenda of power.

It would be naïve to believe and equally simplistic to project her as the ‘hero’ of the episode and concomitantly the champion of resistant ‘movement’. Hers was a weak voice of a victim but abetted by outside forces like the media, international pressure on the Pakistan Government and international women’s organizations indignation, she became the instrument of resistance. There is probably nothing new in Mukhtaran Bibi’s rape case; what is new is the boldness of her stand, the courage to speak and the vision for the future of her community’s girls. With the compensation money she received, she opened a girls’ school in her village which is flourishing and a Women’s Crisis Center which is the mainstay for battered and abused women of Pakistan. Mukhtaran Bibi is called Mukhtaran Mai—elder sister—and she has become the fountainhead of courage, opening up new possibilities for women as individuals. Mukhtaran’s story is of “honour rape,” a scourge that is ingrained in the patriarchal psyche in both India and Pakistan. Unfortunately this social evil has since long remained unchallenged. The predicament of women victims of these local village *panchayats* has been brought out by Usha Bande in an article published in *The Sunday Tribune*, Chandigarh. Bande questions the damaging role played by Khap, Oor and other village *Panchayats* in doling out punishment to women (2004). *Jigra Panchayats* prevalent in the villages in Pakistan follow the similar patterns of punishment. Unfortunately, honour-crimes are not taken seriously by the hegemony, be it India or Pakistan, and honour-criminals are often acquitted. When her case was in the court, Mukhtaran Bibi was apprehensive about getting justice since things as they stand are not affable to women. “Until now, no man, not even a criminal, has ever been punished for ‘a crime of honour’, so

the accused are confident that in the end, they will leave the court room as free men” (69). But public outcry, international focus and the positive approach of a judge helped her to a great extent. She won the case once and is hoping for a fair deal at the Supreme Court of Pakistan, where her case is lying at present.

In her Memoir, Mukhtaran tells of her marriage and divorce in simple straightforward narration. She is illiterate but she had been teaching the Koran orally to the children of the village free of charge; she supplemented the family income by embroidery work. By the village standard, she was a “respectable” woman and hence chosen to appear before the *Jigra* (village council). Significantly, her vulnerability as a divorcee was camouflaged as her “respectability” and she became the scapegoat on whom the Mastrois could wreak vengeance. Mukhtaran records that when she asked, “Why me?” her father and uncle explained to her that the other girls “are too young to do this. Your husband has granted you a divorce, you have no children, you teach the Koran. You are a respectable woman” (4). Our question here could be ‘to *do* what?’ get raped and ravaged? Or to cringe before the beastly Mastrois begging pardon for an imaginary crime? Another point is, ‘did the male members of her family know what was in the offing?’ In all probability they were in the know of it. Mukhtaran resists the attitude of the male members of her family when thrice in the course of her narrative Mukhtaran remarks that in their society women are never told or explained anything. They just follow the diktats of their men. “Mukhtaran, get ready and follow us,” said her father when they were to leave for the *jigra*. And she had no choice but to ‘follow’ them.

Central to Mukhtaran Bibi’s rape was power politics. The simple arithmetic of their hegemonic power structure is “the Mastrois decide and the Gujars obey” (7). The Mastrois, “an influential and aggressive local clan” (3), had suggested earlier that Mukhtaran may be given in marriage to one of the Mastrois, towards which her father was not favorably inclined. To avenge

this disrespect to their power and social position, they tried to implicate Shakur, Mukhtaran's brother in a sex scandal accusing him first of having "spoken" to Salma, the wild and wily daughter of the Mastois; then they charged him of committing *zina-bil-jabar*, "which in Pakistan means the sin of rape, adultery, or sexual relations without the sanctity of marriage." The allegations against Shakur were ridiculous and baseless, to say the least. Shakur was a minor, just twelve; Salma was in her twenties and of dubious character. But Salma was a Mastoi and nobody dared speak against her in defense of Shakur; it was, therefore, easy to trap Shakur and cover up Salma's waywardness. *Zina-bil-jabar* is punishable by death. The only course open to save Shakur's life was to appease the Mastois and it could be possible only if Mukhtaran was sacrificed on the altar of 'honour'. Summing up the vulnerable position of her community, Mukhtaran Bibi recounts that the marginalized Gujars—economically, politically and socially—were terrified of Mastois retaliation. "Their powerful clan leader knows many influential people, and they are violent men, capable of invading anyone's home with their guns to loot, rape, and tear the place apart. The lower-caste Gujars have no right to oppose them, and no one in my family dared to go to their house" (5).

Mukhtaran exposes her society with bold strokes. She tells how in the hierarchical power structure of their system, women are at the lowest rung and the younger women are the lowest of the lowest. The unquestioned pattern is that men decide and women follow. Mukhtaran puts it thus: "Women are rarely informed about the decisions of men, and my father and uncle have told me very little..." (14). As regards the younger women, they are never guided by the elder women but are taught through oblique remarks; the young girls are supposed to pick up their knowledge of the laws of life from the suggestions, evocative remarks and suggestive tittle-tattle circulating around them. This creates a vicious atmosphere in their homes where growing up means

stealing from “the words of others” (91). Mukhtar Mai calls it an “invisible” existence and an education that taught them “distrust, obedience, submission, fear, abject respect for men. It teaches us to forget ourselves” (92).

The compelling character of this situation is not unexpected, since its essential postulations about their community’s organization and human nature are extensively accepted in their society. Neither the men nor the women understand that hierarchies bring out the worst in individuals, and that while those at the bottom suffer particularly, the entire social structure is disfigured, warped and narrowed by such notions of servility. It is never easy to subvert the myth of the powerful nor is it possible to redefine the place of women in a society where the tension between creating consensus and encouraging critical debate is kept alive by the impoverished understanding of its members and by the political climate of hostility to change.

It would be naïve to believe that Mukhtaran Mai’s encounter with the patriarchal power structure, the law and the State was smooth and effortless. On the contrary, it was beset with experiences of acute fear and uncertainty from which neither the media nor the international support could guard her. The Mastois were infuriated as soon as the rape was reported in the media. Initially, Mukhtaran and her family had no role in contacting the media—indeed, they were too poor, ignorant and terror-stricken to think of it. The news probably spread when some men of the Mastoi clan, sitting in an eatery boasted of their exploits during their visit to the town, which some local press journalist, who happened to be present in the same eatery heard the conversation; he investigated and gave an account of it in a local paper. Bronwyn Curran, a Pakistan-based Australian journalist, was the first to report it in the foreign media.

Mukhtaran’s role started only after the rape case became public—she was flooded with reporters and cameramen to tell more and she who had locked herself up and was contemplating sui-

cide, suddenly resolved to punish the wrong-doers. Mukhtaran found her voice, narrated the entire story, telling even the rapists' names. This brought shock-waves in her community as it put the Mastois on an alert. They could never imagine that a woman could open her mouth. This courage, despite the counsel of her relatives, landed her in trouble and psychological stress—it was not easy to encounter the now-estranged well-wishers and the villagers and particularly the enraged Mastois. There were threatening messages from the Mastois; there was panic of being wiped out and also the shame of the social stigma (not of the rape but, ironically, of speaking out and resisting). Added to this was the distress and disgrace of having to spend days and nights in police protection. It was traumatic for the simple Mukhtaran to realize that her female body had become an emblem of personal and political vendetta. But she resolved not to be silenced, to make things public because it was now or never.

There is no doubt that her determination to speak, to voice her grievances and to avenge her dishonour was a kind of revolt—an absolutely new terrain for the meek young woman. Mukhtaran calls it “a springboard for survival, a weapon for my revolt as I seek to avenge my humiliation, a weapon still untested, yet precious to me—because it’s the only one I have. I will have justice, or death. Perhaps both”(28).

Usually, oppression thrives on the silence of the “other.” Once the “other” recognizes the power of refusal, and his/her right to speak, he/she participates in the construction of subject-position. Mukhtar Mai’s determination to fight back is strengthened because of her father’s support and her own reckless thoughts that nothing worse could happen to her now. In her assertion, “I have learnt to exist and to respect myself as a woman” (110), there is acceptance of the self which implies re-affirmation of her strength discovered through speech. The woman who was reeling under the cruel “feeling of guilt for having been raped” (24) and who thought suicide was the only alternative to regain

her honour, acquired a changed perception of herself when she stood “a single woman of inferior caste” against the power of the Mastois. “My presence in this exceptional tribunal can only mean, however, that fate has chosen to show me the way to justice. And if the verdict is fair, it will be my revenge. Standing before these cringing men in chains, I’m no longer afraid to testify, coldly, and without extraneous details” (71).

In her essay “Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender” Kamala Visweswaran refers to speech as agency and shows how the importance of women’s speech is directly relational to the social status of her husband or the male member. Although Visweswaran’s paper deals with the nationalist movement and Indian women’s political speeches (who were from the elite, educated classes fighting for India’s freedom), some of the points she makes apply to the general conditions also. “Speech as agency,” she says, “invokes the idea of self-originating presence, so that conversely, lack of speech is seen as absence.” In Mukhtar Mai’s case, the breaking of silence and her personal presence in the court made her an autonomous subject, in a way. Again, Visweswaran says, “since speech was often equated with agency, a second means of containing women’s agency was to dismiss the power of their speech by arguing for the influence of male relatives. But again, respectability and social status were key, for if a woman’s husband was unimportant, she must also be unimportant, and so, therefore, her speech” (Visweswaran: 90-91). Mukhtar Mai’s family was ‘unimportant’ in the sense that they were subalterns themselves, a low status family as against the Mastois. That is one reason for her to be silenced. Second, she was a divorcee and so ‘unimportant’ because her husband was ‘unimportant’ in her life. Either way she was fit to be exploited and silenced. Though her family has been supportive, they too applied tactics to stop her speech or movement like her elder brother stopping her from going abroad.

Mukhtar Mai’s memoir is inclusive and spread the message of resistance to other oppressed women. She narrates many stories

of victim women who come to her Crisis Center with their anguish with hope to get support. Mukhtaran comprehends that the situation of women in her country is not much different from her own. Slowly it dawns on her that torture, rape, battering and such like atrocities are common occurrences in her land. These are as much private as institutionalized and to a large extent are deeply ingrained in the social psyche. A small pretext or a minor lapse is enough to dispose of or mute forever a woman /wife and if she speaks out it is construed as a challenge to male power and becomes an unpardonable crime. Mukhtar Mai says, “Whatever the pretext—divorce, supposed adultery, or a settling of accounts among men—women pay the heaviest price. They may be given as compensation for an offence or raped as a form of reprisal by their husband’s enemies. Sometimes all it takes for two men to quarrel about something, and one of them will take revenge on the other’s wife. The common practice in our villages is for men to take justice into their own hands, invoking the principle of ‘an eye for an eye’. It is always a question of honour, and they may do as they please: cut off a woman’s nose, burn a sister, rape a neighbour’s wife” (67). There no end to *honour revenge/honour killing*; it continues even after the death or arrest of the criminal because then his (criminal’s) family instead of dousing the fire tries to settle the score. It becomes a never ending enmity and the victim has no respite from fear, no peace. Violence and its corollaries—fear, anxiety and trepidation—terrorize Mukhtaran and her people. Such terrorizing tactics accentuate the hegemonic definition of woman’s place in the fundamentalist society and subalterns’ lowly position in their village.

The mechanism of the systemic intimidation—ridicule, false sympathy, official apathy, and nerve-racking tactics like derogatory remarks, jokes, ogling and obscene suggestions—starts as soon as Mukhtaran is viewed as a threat to the ideology. This is not something new or unusual in the subcontinent when the law enforcing authorities get into their trap women or the subaltern. Let us digress here for a while and refer to two examples from

Indian fiction. In Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things*, Velutha is beaten to death in the police lock-up, later in the police station Ammu is not only derided but also humiliated when the Inspector taps with his baton on her breasts and calls her a *Veshya*. Kiran Desai, in her *The Inheritance of Loss* describes how the police implicate an innocent drunkard for the theft he has not committed, beat him mercilessly and almost cripple him. His fault? He has no Godfather to speak for him. Both Roy and Desai are furious at the system though they camouflage their rage under bitter humour and humour can be an effective weapon in resistant literature.

Counter-resistance comes from the entire socio-political set-up of her country. The police officers are not sympathetic to Mukhtaran. Taking advantage of her illiteracy they twist the case so miserably that there is no similarity between Mukhtaran's 'reality' and the police record. The lower court acquits the criminals who now openly pose a threat to her and her family; the villagers have a ridiculously simple solution for her: she should have committed suicide or buried herself alive instead of speaking and embarrassing the authorities; they, in their righteousness avoid her family; indeed nobody wants to be implicated and incur the wrath of the Mastrois. Thus her resistance gives rise to counter-resistance even at the micro levels of the village and her family: Mukhtaran's elder brother always clamps his orders, not allowing her to travel, thus denying her the opportunity to speak at meetings abroad. The Government's attitude is equally hostile. They not only blame her for playing into the hands of the West but surprisingly, they censure her for exaggerating her rape case. She was dubbed as a CIA agent out to malign Pakistan and brew trouble. Most shocking was the Pakistani President's attitude (General Musharraf was in power then). Unfortunately, he too was not above prejudice. Nicholas D. Kristof recounts in his 'Foreword' to the book a disconcerting incident when Amna Butter, the Pakistani-American physician who was helping

Mukhtaran, was threatened. “The Brigadier Ijaz Shah warned Amna that she and Mukhtar should be careful and not stir up trouble, and he added that Pakistani intelligence knows about everything they do. Alluding to a planned visit by Mukhtar and Amna to New York, he added, ‘We can do anything. We can just pay a little money to some black guys in New York and get people killed’” (xiii). Nicholas Kristof adds that this blunt threat to kill them sounded racist and iniquitous.

This implied open acceptance of violence and intimidating practices. The justification of rape or sodomy shows that this *malaise* is not specific to any region or country; such crimes are wide spread across boundaries of cultures and countries. In her study of sexual violence, Carole Sheffield records that sexual violence may not always be rooted in sexual urge of men but it is often an assertion of power and dominance. Sheffield calls this “sexual terrorism” and points out that violence is conveniently labeled as “male entitlement” conventionally falling into the category of the right of men to control the female body (Sheffield: 3-19).

These and many such unhappy factors do not deter Mukhtaran Mai. She has tenacity and firm determination to carry on her fight, and continue her mission to educate the girls of her community. Her determination smacks of her resistance to the cultural practices of her tribe. “I’ll make sure girls learn to read, and I’ll learn to read too. Never again will I sign a blank sheet of paper with my thumbprint” (77), she declares with a resolve that shows her inner strength. As a girl, she was lively and carefree; as a woman she displays a strong character and awareness unusual for women of her tribe bogged down as they were by male dominance. In fact, her firmness situates her in the midst of a long-running clash and conflict that prefigured notably in the feminist ‘sex wars’, but Mukhtaran does not subscribe to such theoretical concepts; all she knows is that she will fight them as equals and she will recover her lost honour. “Something inside me refused defeat,” she asserts and demands, “How does

one survive dishonour? How does one overcome despair?" Her reply is unpretentious:

With anger, at first, with an instinct for revenge that resists the tempting solution of death, an instinct that allows one to recover, go forward, act. A stalk of wheat beaten down by a storm can spring up again, or rot where it lies. At first I stood back up alone, and gradually I realized that I am a human being with legitimate rights. I believe in God, I love my village, the Punjab, and my country, and all the victims of rape, and future generations of girls. I wasn't really an ardent feminist, although the media considered me one. I became one through experience, because I am a survivor, a simple woman in a world ruled by men. But despising men is not the way to win respect (110).

Despite gaining new insights into the communities other than her own, and distressed at the plight of women, she does not direct her ire at men but at the system and its primitive approach that has conditioned them all. Both men and women join her in her struggle. She is overwhelmed by her father's role in encouraging her to carry on the fight. The judge's words, "Don't give up. Carry on, all of you" (66) infuse them (Mukhtaran and her father) with new life and strength to stand up. The chapter "A Most Remarkable Judge" is, indeed, aptly dedicated to the Judge who refused to buckle under pressure and ensured that Mukhtaran and her people get justice. Posters displaying in bold letters, "COURAGE MUKHTARAN MAI—WE ARE WITH YOU!" come as great morale boosters. Stable and strong support comes from a woman lawyer, Nasseem—her constant companion, friend and guide whose friendship brings fresh air and light to Mukhtaran's life. Support also came and continues to come from different agencies—the Human Rights Commission, International Women's Organizations, Pakistani Women's Organizations and Forums, NGOs and many more. Mukhtaran understands the value of breaking the silence, "The press is paying so much attention to me only because I'm taking my case to the courts.

And in a way, I have also become the public face of a story that actually concerns thousands of Pakistani women” (46).

The public/private dichotomy has always existed for women. In coming into the public arena of high politics and getting international attention, Mukhtaran Mai crossed the boundaries of her female existence and put herself at stake. Her story of anguish and success stands at the intersections of the Third and the First worlds. Her narrative speaks of the ‘real’ woman with her ‘real’ problems and help coming from ‘real’ people. And though it has all the ingredients of feminism, to read it as a feminist text within the feminist discourse/ paradigms would be to restrict it within the bounds of theory. And Mukhtaran’s life, her experiences and her works are far beyond theoretical framework be it feminist theory or resistance theory.

Mukhtaran Mai has learnt a twofold lesson: how to assert herself without being aggressive and how to transcend cultural boundaries without losing her identity. She is trying to control her environ without falling back into the safe but deadly trap of passivity; she is attempting to understand herself as a woman and live *with* her world rather than *against* it; her response to her situation is not aggressive, but neither can it be described as passive—it is resistant. Crucially, her story and the debate it generated, take place within a highly sensationalized honour-rape case; it is therefore of profound interest and deep importance how the story is told and how it gets written because the incident has now transcended the media-report stage and has become literature, though not fiction. The authors and translators have remained intimately involved with Mukhtaran’s life while simultaneously transferring her individual dilemma into a social cause. They have constructed a version of the ‘reality’ by examining what moulds perceptions of ‘truth’ and how sexual, cultural and even textual politics influence the process wherein specific accounts of violent episodes develop into an established consensus.

Resistance also came through the medium of the internet. In an internet entry entitled “Horror in the Name of Honor” Rehana Azim, a UK based lawyer laments that administration and those in power connive at crimes against women and children in the name of ‘cultural’ or ‘religious’ sensitivity; also the concerned community seeks to sweep the unpleasantness under the carpet which results in continuation of violence on one pretext or the other. What Azim says about abused children can well be said in honour rape cases such as these. ‘Cultural sensitivities’ should not be an excuse for silence about ill-treatment of children/women. Pressure groups from outside the community, mobilization of public opinion and courageous women breaking their silence can effectively help change the attitude. Media also can bring forth such cases with impunity because frank discussions, hard-hitting dramas, publications, all have an impact (internet entry <http://www.guardian.co.uk>).

The publicity in foreign media and the pressure from western countries angered some people, not only the authorities but also others who saw in it a ploy to disgrace Pakistan. But that is a narrow parochial view. If the internal media fails to stand up adequately and if foreign media does the job or if help comes to a hapless victim from any other source, there is no reason to rue it. If the state is unable to protect its citizens it has to be brought to the notice of the nation. The Pakistan Human Rights Commission took cognizance of other cases after Mukhtaran’s case came into light. We learn that hers is not a solitary case. Unfortunately, 176 women were killed in the name of honour in the first seven months of 2004 alone; besides there were 151 gang-rape cases. Mukhtar Mai got justice not only because of her courage to speak up abetted by her reckless attitude after she lost her honour, but also because she accepted the help from those willing to help and took the first step to resist

Helene Cixous paints an interesting picture of woman’s attempt to speak and her dilemma as she steps into this new

field. “Every woman has known the torture of beginning to speak aloud, heart beating as if to break, occasionally falling into loss of language, ground and language slipping out from under her, because for woman speaking—even just opening her mouth—in public is something rash, a transgression.” There is more to it, says Cixous. When men do not take her seriously she is flabbergasted. “A double anguish, for even if she transgresses, her word almost always falls on the deaf, masculine ear, which can only hear language that speaks in the masculine” (1997: 98). Mukhtaran has taken the initiative—she has opened her mouth—and has stepped into the male field hitherto unknown to women (particularly of her society) but she succeeds in generating public opinion; she has shaken the apathetic hegemonic structure from its slumber and has crossed the borders and boundaries literally as well as metaphorically.

A totally illiterate woman from a remote village of a fundamentalist society, traveling world over to share the platform with fiery feminists and activists must take an enormous amount of courage. “I’ve become a survivor and an activist. An icon. The symbol of the struggle waged by women of my country” (127). Plays are staged to show the corroding effect of the *Jigra* and such other institutions of ‘private justice’ system; these plays and demonstrations are questioning “if it really is a sin in her country to be born poor and a girl” (128).

Mukhtaran’s image as saviour of suffering women of Pakistan has spread beyond the borders of her country, and if assessed objectively and seen impartially, her strength should bring honour to her country for having allowed a woman “to speak out in protest against an injustice.” But unfortunately her country and society does not view her resistance from this positive angle. Concomitantly, Mukhtaran has ceased bothering for what the administration thinks of her. She has a goal, a mission to accomplish; despite the threats and problems she has decided to stay in her country; in fact, in the village where she was born

and fight the system from within. She is not even contemplating settling abroad. She has a vision for her country and a hope and she wants to see it fructified. But before that she would ask her country—Pakistan—to do some serious heart-searching to find out an answer to the riddle that “if honour of men lies in women, why men want to rape or kill that honour?” Such constructs of resistance throw a challenge to her people and are suggestive of refusal to toe the line; they visualize change. Change is closely related to uncertainty and needs courage—two aspects that are inherent in resistance too. Mukhtaran Mai says, “I often say that if justice of men doesn’t punish those who did ‘that’ to me, God will take care of it sooner or later. But I would like that justice to be given to me officially. In front of the entire world, if that’s what it takes” (130).

After March 3, 2005 when the Lahore High Court Bench in Multan acquits the rapists, Mukhtaran dares even the Prime Minister and writes “Who would ever have told me that I would speak in that way to the prime minister of my country? I, Mukhtaran Bibi, of Meerwala, a quiet, docile peasant woman, now called Mai ‘respected older sister’—how I’ve changed!” (150). We have two questions to ask ourselves as readers: first, could Mukhtaran, given her social, familial and personal status ever resist so stubbornly had she not received help from outside agencies like NGOs, the public and her lawyers; second, could Mukhtaran write with such a force had she written her memoir herself or does it reflect thought process of the oral translators, the writer and the language translator?

Whatever be the outcome of our queries, let us see facts thus: Mukhtaran Mai’s resistance starts at personal level when she decides to come out and relate her story in full to the press, thus resisting her family and community and of course her rapists; soon with public support it becomes an organized resistance and with various issues like violence against women and domestic insecurity getting attached to it, her resistance turns to a kind of movement for women’s rights.

Note: While I was analyzing *In the Name of Honour*, two events took place in Mukhtaran's life: a book *Into the Mirror* discussing Mukhtaran's tragedy struck the book stands and second, Mukhtaran Mai got married to one of the policemen of her security force. *Into the Mirror* written by Bronwyn Curran explores the case through journalistic investigation into the ways of the tribes. While her Memoir dramatizes the unfortunate event, the latter work gives an impersonal account. Read together these books can reveal many more facets of her resistance consciousness.

II

The first question that one would like to answer is: what makes Bama's *Karukku* (2012) a resistant text? The answer is simple: it is the process of insistently questioning the traditional paradigms and re-examining the hegemonic ideologies that can determine the book's potential to the formulation of the concept of resistance. *Karukku* provides the dalit angle of resistance and challenges the discriminatory practices, the stereotypes of passivity and submission to manipulation. *Karukku* is Bama's autobiographical account of her struggle to get recognition as a human being, of resistance she offers to the existing socio-cultural matrix that negates the dalits their human status. She tells her story boldly, it is a tale of the pain of discrimination, grinding poverty and destitution, covering events from her childhood to 1992 when she decided to leave behind her life of renunciation as a nun and jump into the world of action. Both the decisions—to reject a religious life that did not give her inner satisfaction and to embark on full-time writing career and become an activist—are motivated by her strong resistant psyche marked by self-revelation. It is the tool of education that provides her courage to resist the injustice inherent in caste structure, and interrogate exploitative practices that almost paralyze the subalterns—men as well as women.

Dalit awareness in India goes back to the 1950s. After Babasaheb Ambedkar's call to the dalits particularly of Maharashtra, to realize their humanity and mobilize themselves, the dalits recognized the need to assert. In South India, however, dalit assertion became a public question in the 1990s when they challenged the stigmatization of their caste identity and brought new complexity to the debate generated by the Mandal Commission report and the subsequent anti-dalit sentiments. As K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu point out in their 'Introduction' to the Dossier on New Dalit Writing in South India (2011) resistance took many different hues after the 1990s. First, resistance came from the dalits themselves who resented victimization, oppression and discrimination; second, the dalit critics resisted the question of caste as an instrument of oppression and tried to appeal to their brethren to search for a distinct dalit identity of self-assertion and pride. Referring to the Arundathiyar movement as an example where the meaning of caste identity is invoked, the editors of the Dossier further argue that dalit critics regarded caste identity as a shared experience of oppression and of history, myth and culture of a social group and called upon the writers to capture dalit community life in urban as well as rural settings and valorize dalit heroes, dalit history and reaffirm dalit cultural and religious practices (Satyanarayana and Tharu:13). These resistance measures were adopted to erode the power of the dominant groups; with time these acts posed large-scale and conscious challenges to the political and social order. Bama's autobiography *Karukku*, by its very title, contests power; it also focuses on how the ordinariness of resistance, though non-confrontational in nature, becomes a complex reality that could have the potential to challenge the existing hegemonic power structures.

'Karukku' in Tamil means Palmyra leaves; these have serrated edges on both sides and are like double-edged swords. In Bama's autobiography the word 'Karukku' assumes symbolic significance and can be interpreted to connote many things:

the doubly marginalized woman's torment by inside as well as outside forces; it also gives a veiled warning to the oppressor not to be complacent because the serrated, double-edged leaves can become a weapon of revenge; and taken as a riposte it is indicative of newness and freshness, because 'karu' in Tamil also stands for embryo or seed. Bama explains the relation between her life and the Palmyra leaves thus: "There are many congruities between the saw-edged Palmyra karukku and my own life. Not only did I pick up the scattered Palmyra karukku in the days when I was sent out to gather firewood, scratching and tearing my skin as I played with them, but later also became the embryo and symbol that grew into this book" (xxv). In her Translator's Note to the 2011-edition of *Karukku*, Lakshmi Holmstrom writes that the autobiography has a universality at its core "which questions all oppressions, disturbs all complacencies, and, reaching out, empowers all those who have suffered different oppressions" (xiii). A work like *Karukku* that interrogates power structures, establishes identity and empowers the oppressed classes can be called the community's resistant voice. It contributed to the development of their oppositional consciousness. Bama calls up on her people not to be "beaten down and blunted" but to "unite, think about their rights, and battle for them" (xxiv) and challenge their oppressors. Calling it a "bold account" of what life is outside the mainstream Indian thought and function Mini Krishnan, the Editor of the second Edition sees the work as "part autobiography, part analysis, part manifesto" and observes that Bama's exposé of certain aspects of our society is shocking and cannot be ignored.

With this groundwork as the basis, the exploitation and inferiorization of the 'other' and the formation of Bama's contestatory tone must be viewed within the above context because adoption of a challenging tone by Bama makes sense and lends significance to the book as the voice of resistance. The reconfiguration of caste that is now felt nationally is based on the rise

and assertion of the lower castes at the regional level. Bama is the pen name of Faustina Soorairaj. Born in 1958 in Puthupatti village of Virudunagar district of southern Tamil Nadu, Bama belonged to a Tamil dalit Christian family. Her grandfather had converted to Christianity long back and conversion gave them the privilege of education. Her father was in the Army and as Bama observed during a conference in Hyderabad in 2007, she and her siblings did not experience the misery of dalit existence. “I did not experience untouchability. My father was in the Indian Army. I have had the privilege of education . . . Education is the greatest privilege a dalit woman can have” (K. Satyanaryanan and Tharu: 91).

Despite the advantage of living in the Christian ethos and also getting education, Bama did experience discrimination which ultimately led her to take the decision to leave the convent and its claustrophobic atmosphere and enter the world where she was free to choose her way of life. After leaving the convent, she decided to take to writing; she suffered the pain of derision, criticism and anger but resistance and the consequent rejection of the convent helped her find her voice and gave her courage to question her immediate surroundings and mobilize her people. In her “Author’s Preface” to the First Edition, Bama records these facts eloquently:

The driving forces that shaped this book are many: events that occurred during many stages of my life, cutting me like *karukku* and making me bleed; unjust social structures that plunged me into ignorance and left me trapped and suffocating; my own desperate urge to break, throw away, and destroy these bonds; and when the chains were shattered into fragments, the blood that was split—all these taken together (xxxiii).

The “urge to break, throw away, and destroy” eloquently speak of her strong resisting psyche. However, Bama does not take her anger and resistance to the streets; instead she tries to understand the problem of her people vis-à-vis the mainstream society. *Karukku* narrates her story as much as it tries to focus

on the in-fighting among the lower castes and sub-castes which was stratifying their own societies bringing contradictions in the field of caste politics and stigmatizing caste. The hold of caste on the social psyche, despite change of faith, finds its potent expression in the representation of dalit life in Bama's autobiography. This depiction functions on two levels: first, it consolidates her community by revealing *her* wounds that are *their* wounds too and, second, it helps her people to resist the existing politics and claim a place in the national culture.

Bama does not recount her story in a linear manner. It starts with the description of her village, the streets, the people, their living conditions, and the myths surrounding temples and wells and ponds. The descriptions are graphic and help us in understanding the basic structure of the community from where her story springs. By and large, the atmosphere of the village was peaceful and people had accepted the age-old social structure. Bama tells us that when she was studying in the third standard, she had never heard people speak openly of untouchability but it was always there, seething beneath. She had experienced its presence: "But I had already seen, felt, experienced, and been humiliated by what it is" (13). As a young, school-going girl, one day she saw an elder from their street (that is the dalit segment of the village) tottering funnily, holding the packet away from his body in which he was obviously carrying some eatables from the bazaar. The little girl was amused at the sight but on reaching home when she laughed at the scene her brother told her the searing truth that the Naickers were high caste people, and would not eat anything touched by a low caste Paraya. That is why the man was holding the packet away from his body. This was an eye-opener for the little girl (Bama); she was infuriated and sad. She could not understand these spurious beliefs. Bama records, "I didn't want to laugh anymore, and I felt terribly sad. How could they believe that it was disgusting if a Paraya held that package in his hands, even though the vadai had been

wrapped first in a banana leaf, and then parceled in paper? I felt so provoked and angry that I wanted to go and touch those wretched vadais myself, straightaway” (15). Childhood anger and fantasy born out of such experiences became the mainstay of her resistant psyche in those days. She would often wonder why they were treated as sub-humans and never given respect.

Sometime during growing up period Bama learnt the importance of getting education which became her first step towards resisting the system; the best tool to resist and fight discrimination. Her brother, Annan, who was studying in the city, instilled in her the love for education: “Because we are born into the Paraya jati, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities. So study with care, learn all you can...” (18). His words made a deep impression on Bama and she studied hard and found the path opening up before her slowly. But the shame and humiliation of being from the Cheri Street, a Paraya, a low caste girl trying to vie with the higher castes was always lurking nearby. It came not only from the traditional Hindus but also from the Christian priests and teachers. In fact, they were no better because they too were thoroughly immersed in caste prejudices. The Christian priest flung it on her face when she was wrongly implicated in a mischief in school. “After all, you are from the Cheri. You might have done it. You must have done it” (19). It was the coconut plucking incident that had landed her in trouble though she was not at fault.

Things were not much different in the town high school. The Warden-Sister could not tolerate the low caste children and would often find excuse to dump them as unworthy creatures. She had made it a point to contemptuously make the plump girls the butt of ridicule “These people get nothing to eat at home; they come here and they grow fat,” she would say publicly and humiliate them. Bama felt mortified when the Harijan children were asked to stand separately during assembly and

their names were jotted down; when in the bus some woman sitting near her would shift to another seat or insist that Bama should shift elsewhere because the woman would not like to sit near a person coming from the Cheri street. The result of these experiences was that Bama developed anger and resentment and her resolve to excel in her studies would be affirmed after every incident. The denial and deprivation continued even in bigger and better institutions. Once in the school it was announced that the Harijan children would be given special coaching after school hours and the Harijan students were asked to stand up. At that moment, Bama saw contempt in the eyes of her classmates for their dalit classmates. In disgust she just walked away not wanting their special tuition, leaving her teachers aghast at her audacity. She heard words like “What celebration can there be in your caste, for a first Communion?” flung at her by a nun. And she continued fighting her battles for justice.

Resistance is born out of power and is a reaction to power politics. As a dalit Bama felt powerless before the stronghold of dominating castes. She experienced exploitation, injustice, deprivation and discrimination not only at personal level but at community level too. She wanted to raise her voice against the existing class and caste power. “The nature of resistance is such,” says Jasbir Jain, “that it constantly moves between the past and the present, between memory and imagination, and between the actual and the desired” (Jain 2012: 66). Jain is, of course, talking of historical memory but even individual memory of the actual and the desired becomes a significant factor in constituting resistance discourse. Bama’s resistance is as much against the silences of her people as against the exploitative social structure. The past prepares the ground for understanding the present resisting mode. While writing her autobiography Bama recalls the past of her family. Her mother and grandmother worked as menials for the Naickers and were treated dismissively as if they were not human. The Naicker children, even

toddlers, called these elderly women by their first names but her grandmothers addressed even the youngest one as “Ayya”, master, indicative of higher caste monopoly and master-servant relationship. Drinking water poured from a height of four feet; her Paatti and others expected to receive it with their cupped hands held to their mouths; eatables thrown at them all these disturbed Bama. “I always felt terrible when I watched this” (16).

Decades of complacency, abject helpless, economic conditions and silent acceptance of their inferiority made the lower castes vulnerable and prone to oppression. They had lost the will to resist. Acceptance came naturally under those circumstances. Bama recounts her Paatti’s reaction when she (Bama) objected to the Naicker’s attitude, “These people are the Maharajas who feed us our rice. Without them how will we survive? Haven’t they been upper caste from generation to generation, and haven’t we been lower caste? Can we change this?” (17). This mentality is so ingrained that 1960- Report of the Backward Classes Commission substantiated it thus, “The real triumph of the caste System lies not upholding the supremacy of the Brahmin, but in conditioning the consciousness of the lower castes in accepting their inferior status in the ritual hierarchy as a part of the natural order of things” (Report: 1). Bama also understood the role played by conditioning. “Because Dalits have been enslaved for generation upon generation, and been told again and again of their degradation they have come to believe that they are degraded, lacking honour and self-worth, untouchable; they have reached a stage where they themselves, voluntarily, hold themselves apart. This is the worst injustice. This is what even little babies are told, how they are instructed. The consequence of all this is that there is no way for Dalits to find freedom or redemption” (28). Bama questions this collective memory and wants it to strengthen will power so that it constructs a discourse of resistance.

Collective memory is hesitant to engage in revolt of any kind while individual memory of the author refuses to forget the

history of oppression; she interrogates the system. In the process her memory becomes her autobiography and her autobiography becomes her journey of self-discovery. Bama's journey is also physical in the sense that she moves from teaching to the convent to follow the life of renunciation from thence back to normal living in the society. As a teacher when she saw dalit children being ill-treated, she decided to join the nunnery. "I might have continued in that way. But from somewhere or other a desire came over me. It struck me overwhelmingly that these nuns collectively oppressed Dalit children and teachers so very much; why should I not become a nun too and truly help these people who are humiliated so much and kept under such strict control?" (21). Despite warning and advice from her family and others who knew how things worked, she left her job, went to become a nun and experienced discrimination further. That started the "battle within," the "burning anger" and the resolve to give them a fight. She wanted her people to wake up, "We who are asleep must open our eyes and look about us. We must not accept injustice of our enslavement by telling ourselves it is our fate, as if we have no true feelings; we must dare to stand up for change. We must crush all these institutions that use caste to bully us into submission, and demonstrate that among human beings there are none who are high or low. Those who have found their happiness by exploiting us are not going to let us go easily. It is we who have to place them where they belong and bring about a changed and just society where all are equal." (28). Between desire and reality, there is a big gap and Bama realized soon that for dislocating the power structure and their ego it is necessary to raise issues to deconstruct the prevalent essentialism and allow the voices of dissent to be heard. At personal level, she resented whenever she saw discrimination, "...because I had the ability, I dared to speak up for myself; I didn't care a toss about caste. Whatever the situation, I held my head high" (22).

Bama looks at her personal life in *Karukku*, but she cannot segregate it from her community. The narrative mode becomes

socio-cultural as she reveals the plight of her people. She was often distressed at her community's struggle for self-respect and livelihood. Sandwiched between the two—self-respect and the dire economic needs—they could never resolve the issue of caste because economic conditions made them work for the Naickers who owned more than three quarters of the land in the village. Once you are a lowly worker, the question of self-respect is pushed aside. Implicit in her words is the concept that education of her community's children is important to retrieve their selves. Looking at the ill-clad, often naked children playing in the streets, Bama broods over their fate who have “no smell of knowledge or learning” (55). Bama recounts how after school was over she, along with other children of Cheri played their games in the filthy streets and their games were more often than not replays of the adult situations, situations they had seen their parents facing; situations that generated their agony, humiliation and pain. The children would divide themselves in two groups—lower caste and other upper caste with the lower castes cringing and the upper castes inflicting pain on them. Another social evil that sprung up was child labour. The children of the poor classes were made to work in match factories from morning till sunset and they had forgotten to play which is a natural childhood activity.

Since Bama had no role model, she developed on her own—educated herself, got a job, became a nun and then a writer. But nothing could satisfy her because the stigma of her caste and gender was always there—in the society, in the Church, in workplace, in the community and in the family. Her family did not want her to take up a job on the plea that it would be difficult to find her a husband. Bama resented these views and resisted her family and community. Her decision to remain single was probably due to these familial pressures. She made efforts to redefine her 'self'. She tried to see it in close proximity of her family and community. She tried to see the world vis-à-vis

her community and she struggled to arrive at the category of human being, not a caste/class/gender. The conflict between the emotional and the physical became the site for resistance which she integrated not only in her life but also in her text. Her quest for identity, the need for freedom of space came with a heavy demand on her 'self'. Taking up a teaching job, then leaving it to become a nun and then abandoning the convent in disillusionment to return to normal life told upon her mental health. She was often confused and bewildered. She describes her disturbed state of mind thus: "Convent life had changed me fundamentally. I who had once been bold had become an extremely timid person, fearful of everything, ready to burst into tears, and without any strength. I felt orphaned, as if I had no family. I felt too shy even to communicate with people in a normal way. Sometimes I even thought to myself that it would be better to be dead and gone rather than carry on living like this" (78).

Getting over her personal despair and individual consciousness disturbed by the events in her life, she made a firm resolve to leave her past behind, plunge into life and fight for her and her community's rights. She felt like a wounded bird but her resolve to face everything with courage gave her the energy to resist, "I have courage, I have a certain pride. I do indeed have a belief that I can live, a desire that I should live" (122). Every day brought new wounds but also new understanding of life and mental strength. "Beyond all this there stands firm a fierce anger that wants to break down everything that obstructs the creation of an equal and just society, and an unshakable belief in that goal" (138), she writes.

Karukku is Bama's most forceful statement of resistance and search for self-esteem. Her marginalization was triple—caste (dalit), class (poor) and gender (woman). Her experiment with living shows how she became her own hard task-master. She derived strength from her family, friends and community. "I

have met many friends during the course of my life's journey. They have shared my sorrows and helped me in all things. They have inspired me to engage in my work with close attention, with an awareness of my responsibility, and an understanding of the community's needs" (138). Bama's struggle and resistance was not born in a vacuum; its origin could be traced to the social structure and to the complacency of her community that accepted things as they were. Resistance emerged out of awareness brought by education and the knowledge that it is for the dalits to engage in struggle for power, identity and ethnicity. It became vocal when supported by the Government policies and the individual urge for security and identity. Bama does not begin on an ideology but she learns through experience and derives her resolve through her people who always stood by her, "They have helped me to identify my own strengths, and made me put them to use.... I have been restored by love, friendship, support, and advice of all these people, and enabled to live with fresh courage and resolve" (139).

Resistance is firmly embedded in the text of her autobiography, its social relevance and her personal experiences. That she should help her community to come out of the frozen stereotype image and muster up courage to protest against categorization is indicative of her ability to move ahead and reject being locked in fixities of her caste. Hers is not necessarily a militant voice but a firm and quiet assertion, a humanistic appeal for freedom and a questioning of the legitimacy of the power structures that oppress and dehumanize the dalits.

The works discussed here are, in a way, self-narratives—Mukhtar Bibi's *In the Name of Honour* is her Memoir and Bama *Karukku* is her autobiography. These two translated works raise several questions about form and structure. Mukhtar's work dwells largely on her rape, its repercussions and the significance of breaking the silence; Bama's *Karukku* concentrates mainly on the trials and tribulations faced by the dalit girl/woman in a

male-dominated and caste/class-ridden society. One common factor in both cases is that victory lies in facing the troubles and not in running away from them—the principle is fight, not flight. The problem in reading resistance in these works arises because Bakhtin’s “I-for-myself” telling the story cannot be determined. True, that Bama has written her story herself but it comes to us in translated form; Mukhtar Mai’s narrative has changed several hands and what we read is the story presented by the potential “other/s.” In Mukhtar Mai’s case we get is the mirror image of Mukhtar’s fight; Bama’s work reaches us (non-Tamil readers) through the translator and as such a mirror image is what we get. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the intermingling of fact and imagination and hard to determine resistance at personal levels. However, as K. Satchidanandan points out in “Reflections: Autobiography Today” for women, particularly the marginalized women, autobiographies are “explorations of female selfhood” and need a different reading strategy because for them autobiographies can be “a means for survival ... a way of seeking freedom from patriarchal definitions, stereotypical images and expected social roles” (2010: 6-9). Herein lies the location of resistance because resistance can be discerned in the written word. A narrative, when contextualized, encompasses its own textual meaning. It is therefore possible to read the realities of Mukhtar’s and Bama’s lives in their socio-cultural context, as depicted in the text because the narratives enable a reader to see how the two women have resisted the prevalent systems and empowered themselves. The inevitable outcome of their resistance is that they have evolved and are still actively resisting real life situations—and this can be construed as the success of the interpretative perspective.

Notes and References

1. Saroop Dhruva is a poet from Gujarat. The lines quoted here are from the translated version of her poem in Gujarati.

2. See *Embodied Violence*. In their "Introduction" Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis quote Kamala Visweswaran to substantiate their point that woman's modesty becomes "the symbol of violence as the shame and subjection of her community is represented in her." (Kamala Visweswaran, "Family Subjects: An Ethnography of the Women's Question in Indian Nationalism" (Ph.D Thesis, Stanford University, 1990, p 68).
3. Kannabiran points out further that the allegation serves to demonstrate the "lack of character" of minority men who show scant respect for women. Further, aggression on women can then be legitimized by proving their lack of community or family status (See "Rape and the Construction of Communal Identity" in *Embodied Violence*, p. 32-33)

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Eight

Summing Up

In 'woman' I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies.

—JULIA KRISTEVA

What harm is it
To be a woman,
When the mind is concentrated
And the insight is clear?

—SOMA THEIR

(Sri Lankan Buddhist Nun)

LeClair: "Why women novelists didn't write like
Thomas Pynchon?"

Walker: "Why should they want to?"

—TOM LECLAIR

(Interview with Alice Walker)

This study has endeavored to show that the concept of women's resistance stands on the argument that women are badly treated by the society, which is male dominated, and that women must speak out to get "heard" and also defy in order to get visibility. Further, the fact that women are at a systemic disadvantage and they are caught in the systematic oppression due to sexual colonization required the forceful unveiling of their so far unquestioned and indisputable subordination to facilitate the redefinition of womanhood.

Resistance as a form of subversive act challenges the centers of power; though it cannot transform or overthrow power in a

sudden overture, it has the possibility to weaken the oppressive structure and empower the resistant subject. Empowerment becomes a possibility when violations are made public either through speaking up, writing or by organized activities. This examination of literary texts has revealed that reading resistance in creative writing remains a complex proposition because there exists a kind of ambivalence in the position of a reader and an author. The author can privilege a character to decide his/her course of action and also allow him/her to reach resolution of the crisis but in doing so the author needs to be alert lest the oppositional act slips out of control and borders on the fantastic or fantasy, unless, of course he/she is writing a fantasy. For the reader/critic, spotting resistance and weighing its confirmatory effect on the general pattern of the society pose another difficulty precisely because the representation of resistance is in the domain of the fictive. Moreover, the thin dividing line between spontaneous resistance of the character and the conscious resistance of the author is usually blurred in fictional rendering which makes it difficult to segregate the one from the other. This offers an added edge to the study of resistance, particularly in the contemporary Indian women's writing. The present study has taken into account these and various other factors in reading resistance.

One aspect of resistance is its socio-cultural-historical reality; the other is its fundamental ideological base. As a socio-cultural practice resistance has been largely successful, the most glaring example being Gandhiji's philosophy of passive resistance and resistance struggles in many Third World countries. As an ideology, it gives women creative writers the tool to present the picture of the social transformations and the cultural implications of those transformations. Despite the rapid social changes, the strong cultural/traditional leanings of the Indian psyche give resistance an indigenous shade. It is generally agreed that the Western ideological frameworks including the feminist discourse and

its concepts of patriarchy are by no means universal paradigms; nevertheless, it cannot be denied either that the Third World cultures cannot avoid the impact of Western theories; and yet, it is also an accepted fact that to impose the Western parameters on the indigenous cultural or social situations is to ignore the reality of that society and arrive at lopsided deductions. This investigation takes cognizance of these facts in dealing with feminism and Indian women's resistance consciousness.

The "Introduction" therefore, endeavors to perceive resistance in the light of the Western theories to interrogate its viability for the present day Indian realities that are marked as much by the trends of globalization as by the post-colonial situation: if post-colonialism requires rediscovery of the past, globalization necessitates holding on to the past. The vacillation between tradition and modernity, between a strong sense of cultural superiority and the imperatives of seeing the "skeleton in the cupboard" creates aesthetic tension and reading resistance itself becomes a quest. Many of the Indian writers, both male and female, have evolved strategies in which they conform to the traditional idiom and at the same time write in realistic mode thus formulating a subtle setting for resistance. Since the focus of this study is on the selected texts; novels and autobiographies, it has concentrated on the experiences of women in domestic, social, cultural and politico-historical spheres of the mainstream.

Primarily, the question regarding the efficacy of locating resistance in women's writings was scrutinized at the outset. This study argues that resistance in women's texts has particular implications: first, because the Indian philosophy of life in general is not conducive to resistance and second, because women by and large are silenced by the hegemonic discourse. In that case what happens when they resist? What are the different modes they adopt to resist the system to which they are emotionally attached and at the same time, which they find suffocating? Scholars of Subaltern and resistance studies specifically mention

the inability of the Indian character to counter power; they also refer to women's willing submission to authority. However, the impact of the freedom struggle in generating resistance consciousness among women (and other subaltern groups), and the representation of resistance in fictional as well as other narratives reveal the unavoidable presence of both the Western paradigms and the cultural imperatives. R. Radhakrishnan in his discussion of feminism and the narrative of the nation argues that though it is an accepted fact that the Western theories have achieved "macropolitical discourse" (Radhakrishnan 1992: 77-95), it does not necessarily mean that the Western experience is also the experience of the Third World female subject. In the Third World context woman cannot be defined neatly as a 'category'. There are cultural differences in addition to the religion/class/caste/tribe variations and these are significant constructs to be taken into consideration before shaping a definite approach to the study of resistance in the Third World situations. A writer placing resistance in the textual action needs to take all such factors into account. Another important actuality is that Indian feminism is the product of the essentialist discourse of the nationalist ideal. It would not be out of place here to substantiate the earlier statements made in chapter 1, with one more observation. Tanika Sarkar recounts Motilal Ray's comment made in 1931:

If our womanhood is made to lose direction, then the nation's defeat would be complete. If, like the so-called enlightened, westernized Indian man, the Indian woman also takes its western education and changes her own nature and religion then our subjection would be extended from outside to our innermost core" (Ray qtd. in Tanika Sarkar 2000:171).

The image that the nationalist discourse presented and insisted upon went a long way in paving the basic attitude to Indian feminism. Some women's groups tend to thrust aside this restrictive image but it has stayed on in the social psyche.

In the field of literature, resistance can be made operative within the value-system and outside the value-system. Indian women writers in keeping close to the cultural construct have often resisted from within the value-system although there are many contemporary writers who reject the cultural paradigm. The case in point is Shobha De, discussed in this study. To add a few more to the list, novelists like Namita Gokhale, Uma Vasudev, Shourie Daniel and some others oppose the society without inhibition, asserting women's sexuality and exposing those damages that the society would rather keep hidden. The tone of these novelists is often flippant and dismissive. It is indicative of their anger and the urgency to bring in change, but the flippancy of their tone belies their intention and their stories are read as trivial accounts of sex-starved modern urban woman. Most of the readers fail to identify with the cultural ethos within which the novels move. The readership thus dismisses these works as pulp fiction but on close reading one may find a lot of material that is relevant to the woman's condition even though the authors describe the higher strata of society. Then, there are critics who are sore about such flagrantly insolent modes of resistance. Postcolonial scholars like Radhakrishnan firmly hold that when the tradition of writing moves away from the source text of the culture from whence it springs, it loses its moorings. (Radhakrishnan 1992: 77-95)

The search for Indianness comes from authors like Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal who despite their own modern inclinations and the portrayal of the educated, urban women of the metropolis manage to keep the undercurrents of traditional ethos intact. In "Dancing with an Old Flame" Cicely Palser Havelly convincingly analyses the search for Indianness in recent Indian fiction. Havelly argues that resistance is present in many Indian novels but it is often so subtly embedded in the Indian cultural ethos that it is almost impossible for a Western critic to read it as such (Havelly 1998: 234-48). A Western reader

of Shashi Deshpande's novels, for example, may condemn the protagonist's final resolution of crisis as passive; in doing so he or she may overlook the author's emphasis on inner change wrought through self-understanding. Acceptance achieved after introspection is strengt-giving and instead of breaking them the experience gives them vitality to stand and fight. In *That Long Silence* when Jaya thinks in terms of making life possible, she voices the truth that is both philosophical and universal: We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible (Deshpande 1980: 193).

Through the analysis of the nine novels efforts have been made to identify how the novelists themselves take the first step in resisting the social structure by breaking the silence through their writings. But before that, almost all of them resist being slotted as feminist writers and insist on seeing their writings as broad-based. They assert that they are interested in revealing the social ills because it is the society in its imbalanced development that is corroding. Anita Desai has affirmed in many of her interviews that she is interested in the 'human' condition and if she writes about women it is because she understands them better. Shashi Deshpande asserts that being a woman writer one has to "go against a lot of things" (Dickman 2001:130). In the case of Arundhati Roy rebellion and freedom are almost synonyms, and Sidhwa's gaze is on the community through the woman. Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur, Shobha De, all find it challenging and vital to resist the formulations of a unified womanhood and want to see woman as human with her myriad problems. They do not subscribe to the view of woman pushed idealistically and superstitiously into the realm of spiritual isolation and idolatry. For all these writers writing is an act of self-assertion, of trying to uncover the state of things, as they exist not only for women

but also for all those who suffer in one way or the other. The act of story telling is a reclamatory project—a project to look back, resist the situations and reclaim their space. It is not nostalgia but an urge to disclose the secrets that informs these writers' return to the past. The objective is to make the unconscious conscious in the present and recover the past. The past has a wealth of knowledge that could free them but the problem lies in reading that past.

Central to the idea of resistance in women's writing is susceptibility to and reaction against patriarchal domination. One significant point came to light during investigation that women fight not against the male members as such; they target the impositions on them by the patriarchal power relations that leave them with no space of their own. It is the shadow of patriarchy that darkens the life of Kalyani and it is again the specter of Gopal's desertion that haunts the story; the narrative seethes with anger at the unfairness of it all. The novel's rhetoric does not break the family structure. In a significant move, the patriarch's (Gopal in this case) decision to abandon family life opens up space for Sumi to go out into public life and seek employment. In a way it is gain for Sumi who can now be her 'self'. But the novel will lose much of its credibility were it to silence the women into uncritical acceptance of their experiences. The story is replete with experiences seen from different standpoints. They make resistance both powerful and viable.

Ambivalent attitude towards resistance is present in Shobha De's novel. It denounces patriarchy on the one hand and resists any demystification of patriarchal ideology on the other. Karuna is out to ridicule the category called the "modern Indian husbands" but Anjali, Ritu, Si and all others (despite the troubles they encounter with men) perceive that their interests on the personal levels are guarded only in marriage. This attitude can be substantiated with Caroline Ramazanoglu's theory of counter-resistance. Ramazanoglu sees counter-resistance to

feminism coming from women under several conditions: first, when women as affluent housewives have the advantage of leading a luxurious life; second, in the economically or socially disadvantageous conditions where women feel no worse off than their men; and third, where the subordinate or subaltern women feel the threat to their tradition and customs coming from the dominant culture:

First, resistance can be entrenched where the clear gains that women draw from male dominance are taken to outweigh their perceptions of the disadvantages. This can be the case, for example, where affluent housewives have their own incomes, cars, time, and resources to pursue leisure and pleasurable activities and control their time, or take up careers (Ramazanoglu 1989:181).

In the first category we have the example of Anjali and her friends for whom the presence of moneyed men in life means luxurious living. In the second and third category we can place Shakutai's case—her attitude towards Prabhakar (Karuna's molester) is sympathetic despite his inhuman act; and she approves of Urmi's moral support but resists Urmi's middle-class approach to Kalpana's rape.

In a literary text resistance cannot be reduced to the simple computation of protest or dissent. One must examine the writers' location, the ideas on which their beliefs and values rest, their personal and political affiliations and the deployment of strategies used to demonstrate textual resistance. The gendered view of resistance is even more complex and needs close investigation because women generally do not view patriarchy disapprovingly and tend to see their well-being rooted within marriage. A conversation between Dr. Bhaskar and Urmi in *The Binding Vine* can be enlightening in this regard:

'Tell me, is getting married so important to a woman?'

'Yes'... 'For a woman like her, definitely.'

'Women are astonishing. I think it takes a hell of a lot of courage for a woman like that even to think of marriage. Have you seen her husband

- Kalpana's father? What has she got out of marriage - except for the children. And yet, she's longing for her daughters' marriage.'...
 '...women like Kalpana's mother do find something in marriage.'
 'What?'
 'Security. You're safe from other men' (87-8).

Admittedly, the difference between a man's view of marriage and a woman's more pragmatic delineation of it is the key feature in feminist polemic. Usually there is the tendency to over-emphasize women's passivity as well as victimization. Also we should be wary of assessing the existence of a clear demarcating line between the public and the private with regard to women's identity. When ideal women are represented as passive icons of femininity or when the more outgoing women are described as unfeminine, the ideology tends to look at it from the point of view of the dominant discourse and the ideology itself remains gendered. What is important is not to lose sight of women's own resistance to and reworking of the systems of thought.

Women's resistance is contextualized on the premise of empowerment and not so much on the predication of 'equality' in the sense of adopting male roles. Many critics of feminism agree that the feminist emphasis to measure liberation with the yardstick of women's ability to emulate men distorts the main perception of feminism—female power. Women resist the structure that deprives them of empowerment and fight against their oppression, which includes violence, victimization and repression. It is difficult in a text to delineate which aspect of it is primarily about their own specific needs and which are about contesting the ideologies. This difficulty was encountered during examining *The God of Small Things* and *Ice-Candy-Man*. These novels negotiate between childhood experiences and adult perceptions and some of the most intense and confrontational episodes of resistance are recorded here. While contesting ideologies of political and historical nature, the novels also resist female knowledge that they run into during their growing up period.

Spontaneous resistance emerges from woman's instincts—to protect her children and home, to guard traditions, and not to succumb to any pressure from the outside agency, while organized resistance comes from the activist groups.

Reading rape in Shashi Deshpande's two novels brought to light the question of violence and the social expectation and exigency of women's silence. Speaking up is a difficult exercise for women even in the present day circumstances, despite the visible changes to an extent. What Mira wrote she withheld from public gaze as her personal secret, what happened to Kalpana was public but Shakutai and others wanted to hush it up for obvious reasons. The society is not yet ready to exonerate the woman. As I was summing up this chapter I came across an interesting and relevant statement in *The Hindustan Times*, Sunday July 4, 2004, asking "Why Women Suffer Silently." One of the views expressed said, "The Law requires too many questions to be asked. Ideally it should be a summary trial, but becomes a detailed trial with exhaustive cross-examination involving character assassination adding to the frustration and trauma of the victim" (Bhagat 2004: 13). Another rape narrative, Mukhtar Mai's *In the Name of Honour* from across the border, is a personal narrative and it gives real life situation Mukhtar faced. Bama's autobiography *Karukku* looks at the problems faced by triple marginalized woman. Resistance is the anti-thesis of female victim identity. It has shown results in real life situations and it is hoped that its representation in literature will pave the way for further improvement. Mrinal Pande in her *Subject is Woman* records how resistance has brought in silent and imperceptible changes in the Indian society:

In looking for a dramatic revolution, reporters, sociologists and even we women ourselves have often missed out the quiet but pervasive changes that several sections of our body politic are undergoing, as a result of a constant resisting of pressures and challenges of imposed definition by a small, but nationally audible and visible group of

professional middle class women, whether politically right or left” (Pande 1991:38-43).

Resistance is a reflection of the material reality of the culture and literature is a reflection of that culture. We cannot therefore separate the two issues, that is, of culture and literature. Consequently, when there are socio-economic pressures and determinants, the way of life alters and the social organization stands challenged. To an extent culture may also undergo some change. A very cogent summing up of the necessity to resist came from a male, John Stuart Mill who wrote in his *The Subjection of Women*, “whether the institution to be defended is slavery, political absolutism, of absolutism of the head of a family, we are always expected to judge of it from its best instances.... Who doubts that there may be great goodness, and great happiness, and great affection, under the absolute government of a good man? Meanwhile, laws and institutions require to be adapted, not to good men, but to bad. (qtd in Richards 1980: 273). Patriarchy is not to be judged by the presence or absence of a few good men who respect their wives or the few bad men who treat them shabbily. It is to be seen in its totality as working within the politics of power structure. It is this power structure that the women writers take cognizance of when they write texts showing the options open to women. Probably in the current global and transnational scenario our representation of resistance may find itself inadequate to cope with the forces of change, but then resistance itself is a discourse of the process of progression, and literature in depicting it will take a plea for control, empowerment and women’s agency.

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