PERIPHERAL MOTHERS, TROUBLED DAUGHTERS:

EXPLORING MATERNAL AGENCY IN INDIAN

'BOURGEOIS FEMINIST FICTION', *1980-2010*

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Abstract

This thesis studies peripheral maternal characters in 'bourgeois feminist fiction', written by and for the urban, upper-class, upper-caste, English-speaking population of India. It considers 10 novels by 4 authors in this canon, namely Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, and Githa Hariharan. It attempts to reconfigure standardised readings of female agency and resistance in these novels by undertaking a tilted focus upon peripheral mother figures and analysing the forms of 'everyday resistance' and negotiation represented through them. Simultaneously, it traces the shifts in agential representation over the years from 1980 to 2009 (during which these novels have been published) in the context of rising Hindu nationalism and the advent of neoliberalism. It argues that the complex agential possibilities for women theorised by Indian feminists in relation to Hindutva and neoliberalism are particularly visible in the bourgeois feminist text's treatment of the peripheral mother character, who more easily presents the necessary negotiations within her discursive framework as compared to her feminist daughter, and the shifts in whose representation over the decades lends itself to a reading of shifts in literary and social perceptions of women's agency and feminism.

Each chapter of the thesis concerns itself with a specific function afforded to peripheral mother figures, namely those of villainy, nostalgia and political action. The chapter on villainy studies texts from the 1980s which represent a negatively formed bond between mothers and daughters. The chapter on nostalgia studies texts from the 1990s that showcase the daughters' turning towards their mothers who become upholders of cultural identity. The chapter on political agency analyses texts from the 2000s that represent women's participation in anti-Hindutva activism. Overall, the thesis hopes to establish more complex methods of reading female resistance in feminist texts, while contemplating the intersectional and intertextual methods necessary to formulate a literary feminist tradition that accommodates women's agential capacities irrespective of their position in the framework of hegemonic discourses within which they undertake quotidian negotiations.

Contents

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Indian Women and Agency

In late March 2019, as the campaigning for India's next General Election (which began on 11 April 2019) reached its frenzied peak, a video was uploaded to the critical electoral battleground of Twitter. Beginning with a black screen, the viewer was suddenly confronted by stark white words. The video was accompanied by the caption 'Do. Not. Blink', signalling the speed with which it would deliver its message.[1] Its flattering imitation of the company Apple's advertising strategy for its latest iPhone X signalled the video's media and technology-savvy origins. What this video was advertising, however, was a particular idea of an entire nation.

The words that appeared on the viewer's screen at the start of the video promised to encompass 'Modi's New India in 107 Seconds', and the many photos, statistics and short video clips that followed painted a particularly glowing picture of India's current Prime Minister Narendra Modi's achievements in the last 5 years since his election in 2014. The video's clear aim was to support his party's bid for re-election in the 2019 elections so that such success might continue. Peppered in the midst of the many futuristic images of Indian roads and railway stations, and Bollywoodesque montages of the Prime Minister with his team or with powerful international allies, were a few female citizens of the country. Some were ordinary women – smiling at the camera, in saris or hijabs, alone or with husband and child, in front of India Gate or in rural surroundings, all radiating contentment. Others were female members of the Council of Ministers, the number of which the video proudly proclaimed (six). The women's appearance in the video preceded or followed a focus on

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[1] Ashutosh Muglikar, 'Do. Not. Blink. 😊' (tweet, @muglikar_, 30 March 2019), <https://twitter.com/muglikar_/status/1112019575783284736> [Accessed 8 Aug 2022]

women's issues – from the phasing out of *chulhas* (traditional cookstoves that use wood or coal and are hazardous) to increased maternity leave. At the end of this section focusing on women, the video nonchalantly beamed a significant declaration about the meaning of all these initiatives; the word '#Feminism' appeared on screen, followed by a minor edit, to '#RealFeminism'.

In this use of the word 'real', the campaign video engaged in the antagonising and exclusion of other narratives of feminism and embedded itself within a long tradition of ideological struggle between various discourses to demarcate the hegemonic forms of femininity and female agency in India. Supported by its visual representation of 'Indian women' in a number of traditional contexts (the only rupture of this tradition was in service of nation, as depicted by the six Members of Parliament; in all six photos, however, the Members of Parliament are of course traditionally dressed in saris), this single hashtag harnessed a host of rudimentary dichotomies including traditional versus modern, urban versus rural, Western versus Indian, and most importantly, 'true' versus 'false' Indian femininity and feminism. The introduction of this battle over Indian womanhood at this critical juncture in contemporary Indian politics signals its centrality to the conception of a modern Indian nation. Two months after the video was uploaded, on 23rd May, the elections results were declared. The BJP won the 2019 General Election with an overwhelming majority, securing 303 out of a total of 543 seats. And for the first time in independent India's history, the turnout of women voters in these elections was higher than that of men.[2]

The battle over women's representation is not of course a new phenomenon. Feminist historians have recorded the co-option of feminist imperatives by right-wing groups

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[2] Bharti Jain, 'Women Voter Participation Exceeds That of Men in 2019 LS Polls: CEC Chandra', *Times of India* (New Delhi, 26 November 2021) <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/women-voter-participation-exceeds-that-of-men-in-2019-ls-polls-cec-chandra/articleshow/87936542.cms> [accessed 8 August 2022].

throughout contemporary Indian history.[3] This thesis is interested in examining the specific

conflicts that have plagued the feminist theorisation of women's agency since the 1980s and

clearly continue into present day, and the manifestation of these conflicts in a specific genre

of novel published in India, the 'bourgeois' feminist novel authored by urban Indian women

writing in English. It is interested in establishing a link between a crucial recognition of the

need for an intersectional lens within Indian feminist discourse and the novels being

published within this canon in the same decades. Such an intersectional lens accounts for the

discrepancies between dominant 'feminist ideas of sisterhood, women's pacifism, false

consciousness and the secular nature of Indian feminism'[4] and the ethnographic evidence of

women's division across allegiances to religion, class, caste, language, and political ideology.

The thesis posits that the authors' recognition of such fragmentation of the essentialist label

of 'woman' is embedded within the shifting representation of mother characters in the novels

who often present complex and possibly un-feminist forms of agency which contrast with the

daughter-protagonists' own relatively straightforward enactment of resistance to patriarchy.

This thesis therefore undertakes a tilted study of the representation of agency in these texts

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[3] Works that study such co-option include *Women and Right-Wing Movements: Indian Experiences*, ed. by Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (London ; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995); Patricia Jeffery, 'Agency, Activism, and Agendas', in *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 221–44; Gabriele Dietrich, 'Women and Religious Identities in India after Ayodhya', in *Against All Odds: Essays on Women, Religion and Development from India and Pakistan*, ed. by Kamla Bhasin, Ritu Menon, and Nighat Said Khan (Delhi; Colombo; Philippines: Kali for Women; South Asian Women's Forum; Isis International, 1996), pp. 35–49; Radhika Desai, 'Culturalism and Contemporary Right: Indian Bourgeoisie and Political Hindutva', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34.12 (1999), 697-697+699-712; Paola Bacchetta, '"All Our Goddesses Are Armed": Religion, Resistance and Revenge in the Life of a Militant Hindu Nationalist Woman', in *Against All Odds: Essays on Women, Religion and Development from India and Pakistan*, ed. by Kamla Bhasin, Ritu Menon, and Nighat Said Khan (New Delhi; Colombo; Philippines: Kali for Women; South Asian Women's Forum; Isis International, 1996), pp. 133–56; Wendy Doniger and Martha Nussbaum, 'Introduction', in *Pluralism and Democracy in India: Debating the Hindu Right*, ed. by Wendy Doniger and Martha Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 22–58; Bina Srinivasan and others, 'Women in a Fractured Society: The Gujarat Pogrom and After', in *Women and Violence in Gujarat: Special Plenary Session* (presented at the Xth National Conference of the Indian Association for Women's Studies, Bhubaneshwar: Indian Association for Women's Studies, 2002), pp. 3–15; Indu Agnihotri and Vina Mazumdar, 'Changing Terms of Political Discourse: Women's Movement in India, 1970s-1990s', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30.29 (1995), 1869–78. The findings of these studies will be explored in much more depth in the second chapter of this thesis.

[4] Elen Turner, 'Empowering Women? Feminist Responses to Hindutva', *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, 28 (2012) <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue28/turner.htm> [accessed 20 October 2018].

through a focus on maternal figures (and daughters' relationships with them) in order to extract a more fluid conception of women's capacity for resistance.

In order to embark upon this specific investigation of agency and resistance in the 'bourgeois' feminist novel, it first becomes necessary to delineate the ideas of Indian womanhood and the theories of 'everyday' resistance that come to bear upon this textual analysis. This introductory chapter is thus concerned with examining the manner in which Indian womanhood and agency has been shaped by the various hegemonic discourses in play, both historical and contemporary. In keeping with the focus upon agency, the chapter intends to observe not only how women become products of certain discourses, but also how they come to influence these discourses through their own negotiatory functions within them, thus following a theorisation of feminist historiography by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid where:

> Feminist historiography rethinks historiography as a whole and discards the idea of women as something to be *framed* by a context, in order to be able to think of gender difference as both structuring and structured by the wide set of social relations.[5]

The aim here will therefore be to focus upon women's manipulation of epistemes to allow for an assertion of their agency, while simultaneously producing discourses of patriarchy, colonialism, class and, of course, feminism through their agential capacities. I begin this investigation by first elucidating upon how the concepts of female agency and resistance themselves are being defined in this thesis.

Agency, Resistance, and Gender

In its broadest formulation, agency as understood in this thesis is framed within Marxist and postmodernist traditions, which are closely associated with notions of discourse and

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[5] Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, 'Introduction', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 1–26 (p. 3).

subjectivity, hegemony and interpellation, power and resistance. It is then, specifically, 'the

socially determined capability to act and to make a difference,' with emphasis being placed

upon the notion of social determination. This focus upon a structured context also connotes

that agency is determined by the dialectics of power, so that it takes into consideration

'differentially distributed social resources that give rise to various degrees of the ability to act

in specific spaces, so some actors have more scope for action than do others.'[6]

Resistance, on the other hand, is theoretically more radical in its underlining of

'opposition or insubordination that issues from relationships of power and domination.'[7]

However, in recognising the contextual nature of resistance as defined within the postmodern

tradition, it becomes necessary to account for contingencies, and to underline the Foucauldian

assertion that 'there are no "margins" outside of power from which to lay an assault on it or

from within which to claim authenticity.'[8] There is, then, no Other space from which the

centre can be adequately examined and resisted against, since all subjectivities are bound

within discourse. And it is this omnipresence of power that allows the theorisation of

manufactured consent, and the complicity of the subordinate class through their interpellation

(or indoctrination) into the dominant ideology, that is through hegemony.[9] This influence of

the ideas of interpellation and hegemony on the theorisation of agency and resistance has

been critiqued for its fatalism in ethnographic works since the 1970s and 1980s when the

concept of 'everyday resistance' was coined by James Scott.[10] French feminist work by Julia

Kristeva and Toril Moi, and ethnographic studies of various subordinate groups including

enslaved peoples in America and the Caribbean, working class children in London, subaltern

populations in the Indian subcontinent, peasant populations in South-East Asia, and women

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[6] Chris Barker, *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies* (London: Sage, 2004), p. 4.

[7] Barker, p. 178.

[8] Barker, p. 178.

[9] This concept of hegemony was first introduced by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* (1971).

[10] James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

undertaken in these decades showcased the daily resistances of those subordinated by dominant discourses.[11] These forms of daily resistance were theorised as not affecting a revolutionary shift in society, primarily because of the possibly perilous consequences of failure. Instead, they highlighted how the subject attempted to manipulate the status quo to their maximum benefit in order to achieve humbler goals of survival.

While these forms of resistance do not allow for the complete *overthrow* of dominant discourse that a radical revolution might be able to effect, their very existence also serves as a warning against an evaluation of resistance based upon notions of effectiveness or organisation. In fact, as Jack Halberstam theorises in his important work on 'the queer art of failure' and 'shadow feminisms', small resistances can often 'dwell in the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossible dark and negative realm of critique and refusal.'[12] Thus, failure to engage with dominant discourses can itself function as resistance in that it is 'a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline.'[13] This conceptualisation of 'everyday resistance' that engages in critical negotiation with dominant discourses and highlights the agency of those occupying subordinate positions thus theorises power itself as a fluid, dynamic entity in which no subject is in complete power and none completely subordinated.

Moreover, a focus on such resistance also serves as a critique of Western 'progressive' liberalism. As Saba Mahmood has suggested in her influential study of female agency in the context of Islamic piety in Egypt, 'it is crucial to detach the notion of agency

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[11] In her critical work on the discursive nature of gendered resistance amongst the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin women of Egypt in 1990, Lila Abu-Lughod cites these various feminist and sociological works as some of the earliest readings of such 'everyday' forms of resistance among marginalised groups which influence her own work. The ethnographic studies Abu-Lughod refers to include Eugene Genovese (1974), Lawrence Levine (1977), Michael Craton (1982), David Gaspar (1985), Paul Willis (1981), Ranajit Guha (1983), James Scott (1985), Emily Martin (1987), Aihwa Ong (1987), and Sandra Morgan and Ann Bookman (1988). Lila Abu-Lughod, 'The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women', *American Ethnologist*, 17.1 (1990), 41–55 (p. 53).
[12] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 2.
[13] Halberstam, p. 88.

from the goals of progressive politics' and to recognise that the goals of liberation and subversion are not necessarily the desired outcome for all agents.[14] In fact, Mahmood goes further in order to distinguish between 'agency' and 'resistance' (both terms that are extremely relevant to this thesis), and advocates that 'we think of agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create.'[15] What Mahmood highlights then is subtle negotiation with the framework of discourses within which the subject is embedded. Such negotiation becomes the focus of Indian feminism in these same final decades of the twenty-first century, which can thus be contextualised by this global interest in reformulating concepts of agency and resistance alongside the specific conditions within which Indian feminism itself originated. This Indian feminist interest in 'everyday resistance' also strongly indicates the particular relevance of the concept to gendered resistance, as evident from its prominence in feminist theory around the globe.

Lila Abu-Lughod, in her study of Bedouin women, notes that 'gender power seems to be one of the more difficult forms of power to analyze.'[16] Indeed, feminist studies have showcased how the issues in defining gendered subjectivities and women's capacity for resistance have been graver than defining resistance in relation to class, colonialism, feudalism, or slavery, primarily because of women's heterogeneous locations within society and their compromised or often complicitous positions within dominant ideologies. This is underlined by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's observation that '[w]hile every hierarchical social

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[14] Saba Mahmood, 'Agency, Performativity, and the Feminist Subject', in *Pieties and Gender*, ed. by Lene Sjørup and Hilda Rømer Christensen (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 13–45 (p. 24).

[15] Mahmood, p. 15. While Mahmood reads 'resistance' as necessarily aiming for 'freedom' as defined by progressive politics and therefore separate from 'agency' which consists of a less liberalist valence, this thesis often uses the two terms 'agency' and 'resistance' synonymously. In doing so, however, it hopes to disrupt this association of resistance with liberalism and to allow forms of discursive negotiation to be read as resistance not *only* to 'conservative' norms of patriarchy, but also the prescriptive liberalism of feminism. In this, the thesis adopts a reading promoted by Jack Halberstam's work on failure and shadow feminisms, which move the concept of resistance away from any positivist associations.

[16] Abu-Lughod, p. 42.

arrangement does nevertheless offer some compensation to those at the bottom of the structure in the interests of maintaining its hegemony […] it offers them less of a share in the spoils than it does to women.' It is thus more difficult to form a women's resistant collectivity in comparison to other subaltern groups for whom '[t]he opposition of interests is more clearly visible; the dominated have a more sharply defined collective identity; they have more to gain and less to lose by organising protest and opposition.'[17] Feminist movements around the world (including in India, as we shall see) have been impeded by the various fractures within women's identities which compromise the collectivity of the organisation.

In light of this limited possibility of women's collectivity, the abovementioned forms of humble, individualistic, everyday resistance can be viewed as being particularly suited to women. For example, Deniz Kandiyoti's theory of 'patriarchal bargains' clearly demonstrates how '[d]ifferent forms of patriarchy present women with distinct "rules of the game" and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression.'[18] Kandiyoti thus highlights women's negotiatory capacities while also underlining the malleability of patriarchal discourses themselves that create such possibilities for strategizing. While thus working against the 'false consciousness' argument which assumes women's blindness to their own patriarchal subjugation, the study of female agency must also prevent the essentialisation of the female identity as always and already resistant.

Saba Mahmood underlines the dangers of uncritically reading such resistance into acts of female agency: 'To the degree that feminism is a politically prescriptive project, it requires the remaking of the sensibilities and commitments of women whose lives contrast with feminism's emancipatory visions.'[19] Mahmood is concerned, as was noted above, with the

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[17] Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, 'Introduction: Feminism and the Politics of Resistance', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 7.2 (2000), 153–65 (pp. 158–59).
[18] Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with Patriarchy', *Gender and Society*, 2.3 (1988), 274–90 (p. 274).
[19] Mahmood, p. 43.

Western liberal feminist project of liberating the female subject, particularly in non-Western

contexts. Here, everyday forms of resistance, particularly those that defy expected forms of

subversion, present themselves once again as useful in preventing such uncritical readings.

Jack Halberstam identifies the unexpected acts of 'failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking,

undoing, unbecoming, not knowing' as forms of agency that function as 'patently unfeminist

acts and activities [which] point to the limits of a feminist theory that already presumes the

form that agency must take.'[20] Thus, a focus upon small, everyday resistances can help in

preventing an essentialisation of the female subject.

Another important step in preventing simplistic readings of female agency is to

recognise the complex framework of hierarchies based on gender, caste, class, religion, and

geography within which women as subjects are located. It was this complex framework that

was highlighted by the Third Wave of feminism in order to identify women who are

oppressed within multiple discourses, as well as to recognise of the complicity of women

belonging to the dominant class, race, caste or nation, who 'are in many instances

indistinguishably part of the normative male discourse, including the construction of it.'[21]

This recognition of plurality, hierarchy, and intersectionality within gender discourse allows

for the theorisation of hegemonic ideals of femininity that are constantly contested by other

subordinate ideologies of femininity.[22]

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[20] Halberstam, p. 2;127.

[21] Nita Kumar, 'Introduction', in *Women as Subjects* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), pp. 1–25 (p. 21).

[22] Such an understanding of gender is supported by the work of R.W. Connell (2005) on masculinities. Connell theorises the existence of various masculinities which interact with each other within a hierarchical structure of power. Masculinities can thus be hegemonic, subordinated, complicit or marginalised, with each discourse of masculinity receiving (or being denied) 'patriarchal dividend[s]' which Connell defines as 'the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women.' (p. 79) For Connell, such a relational understanding of gendered power dynamics must be superimposed upon the already existing framework of pluralities predicated upon notions of race, class, caste, and nation so that it becomes possible to theorise the complex discursive locations of 'gay black men and effeminate factory hands, not to mention middleclass rapists and cross-dressing bourgeois.' (p. 76) R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

The dynamism of gender relations is thus always inordinately linked with the power play of other discourses within the cultural system, with each discourse advocating its own ideologies of femininity and masculinity. This means that, as much as patriarchal discourses propound a hegemonic femininity based upon a specific value system (for example, the Brahminical-patriarchal production of the *Sati-Savitri* figure which privileges the function of wifehood), so do feminisms (for example, the working woman's figure which symbolises independence from patriarchy).[23] Such a notion of a hierarchy of femininities within a specific discourse goes some way in helping us tackle the problematic of the negatively defined, disidentified subjecthood that is formed through exclusion. Here, we find that the powerful ideal of the working woman does not eradicate other formulations of femininity (such as the figure of the mother or housewife), but it does subordinate them. Additionally, these contestations clearly involve more than one discourse, since the working woman can also be seen as representing a capitalist ideal of femininity.[24]

This underlining of the various discourses enmeshed within an understanding of gender identities helps highlight the extremely complex framework within which women as subjects are required to negotiate and create spaces for themselves to enact any form of agency. It also underlines, as Kumkum Sangari identifies in her crucial essay 'Consent, Agency, and the Rhetorics of Incitement', how a study of female agency that accounts for the 'socially structured and often sanctioned forms of indirect agency, in their specific articulation of consent and resistance' requires us to 'work with a notion of materiality which

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[23] *Sati-Savitri* is a phrase that signifies wifely devotion to her husband, and is based upon two wives from Hindu mythology who epitomise such loyalty. The first, Sati, is angered by her father's insults and behaviour towards her husband Shiva. In her fury, she curses her father to die at Shiva's hands and immolates herself. The second, Savitri, marries an exiled prince who is destined to die within a year. When the God of Death Yama arrives to claim his soul, Savitri uses her wit to extract boons from the God and brings her husband back to life.

[24] It becomes important here to delineate the context within which this ideal of the working woman becomes hegemonic. This takes place at the specific conjuncture when the Indian economy was liberalised in 1991 and women were encouraged to participate in the newly-formed capitalist economy, and a simultaneous emphasis is placed within the feminist movement on women's entrance into the public domain. This figure of the working woman, and its context, will be further addressed later in this chapter, as well as in the next chapter's discussion of the New Economic Policy adopted by India in 1991.

can extend from miniscule arrangements of daily life to broader features of social formation.'[25] Sangari thus identifies how the 'everyday' nature of such resistance interacts with the larger discourses it is enmeshed within.

These complex ideas of the agency of and resistance by women were put to use by feminist theorists in India, from the 1980s onwards, in the study of historic and well as contemporary female subaltern figures, in order to underline the manner in which female subjectivities in India have been manipulated by the various discourses in play. These works – spanning the historical, sociological, anthropological, cultural and literary – form the core of the next section which delineates the complex formation of Indian womanhoods.

Indian womanhood and agency

The above theorisations of agency and resistance, and the complexities inherent in these terms, at once allow and impede the possibility of creating any linear history for the large and complex entity of the various womanhoods inscribed within the larger umbrella of Indian womanhood. As Nita Kumar has remarked:

> [e]ven while we want to act for the liberation of women, we must acknowledge that women, as such, have neither been liberated nor repressed. Rather there has been a succession of discourses about femininity, about purity, virtue, honour and womanhood that have displayed knowledge and power differently at different periods.[26]

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[25] Kumkum Sangari, 'Consent, Agency and the Rhetorics of Incitement', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28.18 (1993), 867–82 (p. 867). Sangari's essay is one of the most important theorisations of female agency in India. Sangari is concerned with the opportunities for engagement with public discourses that have been afforded to women within traditional patriarchal discourses, which produce convoluted forms of women's agency. Sangari studies one such form, namely female incitement where the woman enters the 'surveillance of a male "public" domain by calling paternalistic patriarchy to account in recognised forms of surrogate action.' (872) Incitement inhabits the uneasy space between women's consent and resistance to patriarchy because, while the inciting woman is hegemonised within and directly promotes patriarchal values, her momentary and indirect agency also presents a threat because it provides her with situational control over the man's status and masculinity. Incitement therefore 'threatens symbolic castration.' (873)

[26] Nita Kumar, p. 9.

The most well-known articulation of the manner in which such discourses have influenced female agency in India is Gayatri Spivak's theorisation of subalternity in her seminal 1988 essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak,' which bases itself upon the figure of the Indian woman.[27] Spivak's tracing of various significant discursive shifts in Indian history, and their ramifications for Indian women at the specific historical juncture of Indian independence provides a framework, using which I undertake another study of female agency and representation at similarly significant discursive shifts within contemporary Indian history.

The plurality of gender identities emphasised so far through a focus on intersectionality necessitates the addressing of the conceptualisation of Indian womanhood within this thesis. The focus here is placed primarily upon Hindu womanhood, rather than a holistic perspective that privileges women embedded in discourses of all religions practised in India. This narrow focus is necessitated by the texts under study later in the thesis which are marked by their hegemonic Hindu milieus, which in itself presents a critical point of departure for our analysis. Within this very articulation of Hinduness, there is (in the novels as well as in this thesis) also an implicit recognition of the other discourses of womanhood that inform and affect notions of Hindu womanhood. An examination of Muslim womanhood, for example, becomes imperative to understanding Hindu womanhood, because of its placement in a Saussurian binary with it (in that, each is defined in the image of the other). In the current political climate with the essentialisation of a Muslim identity and its implications for Muslim women, it seems insensitive to ignore the subjectivity in India whose agency is most at stake. The attempt here, however, is one of self-reflexivity or of a turning inward upon the majoritarian identity politics which have allowed for the formulation of the

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[27] Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, 'Can The Subaltern Speak', in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (London, United Kingdom: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 66–111. Spivak's essay underlines the complex discursive framework within which this 'third-world woman' is implicated, and the complete absence of her voice in a debate that is ostensibly *about* her, namely the debate around widow immolation or *sati* in colonial India. Since Spivak's essay, this historical subaltern figure of the widow has generated much scholarship, notably the work of Lata Mani (1990; 1998).

dichotomies of Hindu versus Muslim women. This is then a study of 'the oppressor' or 'the complicitous' and of the origins of the oppression itself, with a specific tilt towards women who belong to this majority who benefit from (or challenge, in rare instances) this dominant discourse of Hinduness. The formulation of these notions of specifically religious womanhoods, and their necessary dichotomisation, can itself be traced back to one of the most disruptive discourses in India that enforced a rigorous compartmentalisation of culture and history, and necessitated such receding into communal identities, that is the discourse of British colonialism.

Colonial Constructions of Indian Womanhood

Though this process is oft repeated, any well-formulated historiography of Indian womanhood warrants a brief reiteration of how the colonial episteme reconfigured the notion of an Indian woman in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, influencing not only contemporaneous ideas of womanhood at the time but effecting radical shifts in the manner in which Indian society viewed the historical genesis of an ideal Indian womanhood. The colonial enterprise has been underlined repeatedly by historians and cultural theorists as a disruptive force that necessitated a reconstruction of the Indian people's perception of their own past.[28] The impact of such disruption on the specific figure of the Indian woman is delineated by historians like Uma Chakravarti, who notes the formation of 'a narrow and limiting circle in which the image of Indian womanhood [became] both a shackle and a rhetorical device that nevertheless function[ed] as a historical truth.'[29]

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[28] Historian Uma Chakravarti has recorded the reshaping of the collective Indian psyche through the replacement of the precolonial lens on history that relies on 'popular beliefs, mythology…and folklore' (27) with a formal, colonial history. Chakravarti notes how this shift is effected by both an Orientalist zeal of the colonising missionary and the Indian intellectual who is forced to produce a rebuttal to challenge the colonising discourse. Uma Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, ed. by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 27–87 (pp. 27–38).

[29] Chakravarti, p. 28.

This essentialisation of the 'Indian woman' is attributed to the tussle between the coloniser and the colonised to utilise women's status as a source of legitimation for their respective discourses. For the coloniser's discourse to be able to validate its purpose, it becomes vital to establish the rhetoric of '[w]hite men […] saving brown women from brown men,'[30] through a focus upon the cruelty of rituals like *sati* and child marriage, while the intelligentsia among the colonised attempt to ameliorate 'women's conditions' in order to mount a challenge to this discourse of the Savage and his oppressed women. The reactionary nature of the earliest attempts at reform for Indian women exposes the contradiction that fetters its origins. It becomes obvious that, under the pressures of colonisation, the impetus for the uplift of Indian women came from educated Indian men operating under notions of control rather than women's freedom from patriarchy or independence from men.[31] It 'was not a result of some sudden outbreak of generosity on the part of men' but a reformulation of patriarchy to 'bring it in line with the material needs of the urban middle class.'[32] These early attempts at a reformulation of Indian womanhood were thus focused upon the redemption, not of Indian women, but of Indian men.

The 'bourgeois' label inherited by the canon under study in this thesis traces its roots to this same newly formulated middle class or bourgeoisie in the colonial period, which consisted largely of previously dominant, upper-caste communities, who were recruited by the British in the hopes of creating a 'class of clerks and Babus' who could attend to the more menial tasks of running the empire and, perhaps, provide the British with a core of local backing'.[33] Implicated through British education in the Western discourse on femininity and

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[30] Spivak, 'Can The Subaltern Speak', p. 92.

[31] Gail Minault, 'Other Voices, Other Rooms: The View From the Zenana', in *Women As Subjects*, ed. by Nita Kumar (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), pp. 108–24.

[32] Vir Bharat Talwar, 'Feminist Consciousness in Women's Journals in Hindi, 1910-20', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, ed. by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, trans. by Manisha Chaudhry, Neeraj Malik, and Badri Raina (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 204–32 (p. 205).

[33] Tabish Khair, *Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 44.

finding their own women were comparably 'coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of

superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous', efforts were made by this Babu class to educate

their women as also to rid Indian culture and Indian womanhood of any practices that

encourage the imperialist label of savagery.[34] The specifically middle class location of this

reformism is central to the bourgeois nature of the hegemonic discourse on femininity, which

becomes the foundation of the femininity that is underlined in the post-independence feminist

movement.[35] The problems that this bourgeois location invites, for Indian feminism as well as

for the 'bourgeois' feminist text of the 1980s, will be examined at a later stage, alongside a

focus upon the rigid dichotomies of home/world and private/public that are introduced

through this gentrifying of the Indian female identity, which has been the focus of a

substantial portion of scholarship on women in the colonial period.[36]

In observing these ideological overhauls executed by the reformulations of patriarchy

within Indian society in this period, it becomes obvious that the primary condition upon

which the discourses of culture promoted by both the coloniser and the colonised function is

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[34] Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, ed. by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 233–53 (p. 244).

[35] This hegemonic femininity is devised through a series of negations, that is, through defining what the Indian woman was *not* – she was *not* a westernised woman or *mem sahib* (and was therefore still traditionally Indian), *not* the classical Indian woman (and was therefore no longer oppressed and had a modern perspective), and *not* the 'common', generally lower class woman (and was therefore refined or cultured). Sumanta Banerjee's study of the Bengali *bhadramahila* of the nineteenth century showcases this dichotomisation of 'upper' and 'lower'-class women. This particular formulation of identity through Othering plays a central role in the identity politics presented in the novels, with the protagonist being surrounded by women who serve as foils and help demarcate the limits of what the protagonist is *not*. Sumanta Banerjee, 'Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, ed. by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 127–80.

[36] An important contribution has been Partha Chatterjee's historiography of this binary (1990), which investigates how 'the women's question' was tackled by reformist and nationalist discourses as they confronted the challenge of achieving a balance between 'modernity' and 'tradition' and the role that the public and private spheres played in this balance. On the other hand, Gail Minault (1994) has attempted to deconstruct this binary through a revalorisation of the private sphere to underline the agential possibilities it presented women with. Here, the well-known rhetoric of the stultification of the private sphere and its attendant connotations of 'women in need of saving' becomes exposed as a production of the imperialist gaze as well as the (native) male gaze. The public/ private dichotomy then becomes a Saussurian binary, where the essentialisation of the 'female' private sphere, and the women who inhabit it, as stagnant helps create the 'male' public sphere in its image as vital and dynamic.

the passivity of the woman, such that she is completely stripped of agency. The discursive struggles surrounding the *sati* debate have best exemplified this passivity, where women inhabited neither the subject or object position within this struggle, and were instead reduced simply to 'the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated.'[37] The dominant epistemes thus produce the Indian woman in colonial times as reduced to the function of representation. And it is traces of this representational function that are going to be analysed in this thesis in the context of the motherly role.

Indeed, it is the motherly figure that functioned as the most powerful manifestation of womanly function of representation in the colonial period. Not only was the Indian woman essentialised into nothing more than her reproductive function, but this function was closely scrutinised with the onset of colonisation to extract both its shortcomings and its possibilities for developing resistance. Social reform in the nineteenth century itself stemmed from concern for women as *mothers* and their contribution to the larger discourse of the nation. In debates around the issue of child marriage, for example, the focus was not upon violations of the age of consent or of the girl child's human rights, but instead on the fact that women (or girls) giving birth to children at an early age 'weakens the physical strength of the nation […], and brings forth a race of people weak in strength and wanting in hardihood.'[38] This weakness, supplemented by the fact that 'the ignorance and superstitiousness of their mothers led whole generations of Indians to lose their 'entrepreneurial' spirit', is noted as the root of the Indian fragility that apparently allowed the British to colonise India.[39]

This concern for the nation that is expressed through debates on motherhood is extrapolated to the point where the primary mother function itself is granted to the nation, so

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[37] Lata Mani, 'Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, ed. by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 88–126 (p. 118).

[38] The Jessore Indian Association, qtd. in Radha Kumar, *A History Of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 1993), p. 24.

[39] Radha Kumar, p. 23.

that nationalist zeal is directed towards 'Bharat Mata' ('Mother India'). Such rhetoric of the

mother-nation is further intensified through another important association – that of the Hindu

goddess as mother, which is imperative in pointing to the essentially Hindu core of the

hegemonic Indian female identity formulated at the time, and which has continued to echo in

the presently dominant conceptions of Indian femininity.[40] The pervasiveness of this Hindu-

centric ideal is emphasised in the fact that even Mahatma Gandhi, in speaking of women's

progress, uses Hindu rhetoric.[41] These colonial ideologies of mother-as-nation and mother-as-

goddess have impacted the discourse of Indian womanhood in complex ways. The human

mother figure, as the symbol of Bharat Mata (Mother/ Goddess India), is assigned the role of

'the stable centre of a fragile colonial society', who must '[provide] constant solace to the

humiliated son' while, 'on occasion her heroism acts as an inspiration to lift up the

downtrodden spirit of the son.'[42]

In her study of gender and nationalism, Neluka Silva observes that 'while feminised

images (most blatant in the projection of India as Bharatmata) define the *iconography* of the

nation, the *practice* of nationalism is reserved for the male.'[43] Silva thus also points to the

representative function that women are reduced to in this context. This point is further

strengthened by Sumathi Ramaswamy's readings of the visual representations of Bharat Mata

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[40] Jasodhara Bagchi (1990) has analysed these significations of the mother-as-nation and mother-as-goddess, specifically in the literary works of the nationalist novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. The role of Hindu goddesses within nationalist discourse has further been explored by various theorists including William Sax (1994); Ashis Nandy (1998, pp. 8-9); Radha Kumar (1993, pp. 44-49), who have focused specifically upon the shift in the signification of hitherto marginalised goddesses like Durga and Kali, whose ferocity and potent sexuality were now channelled and directed against the coloniser. Bagchi; William Sax, 'Gender and Politics in Garhwal', in *Women as Subjects*, ed. by Nita Kumar (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), pp. 172–210; Ashis Nandy, *Exiled At Home*, Oxford India Paperbacks (2005) (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Radha Kumar.

[41] For Gandhi, the reform of Indian women's conditions must be modelled upon 'the purity, firmness, resolve and the spirit of self-sacrifice of Sita, Damyanti and Draupadi so that they become 'pure as satis' and can 'begin to command the same respect in Hindu society as was enjoyed by their ancient prototypes. (Talwar, p. 231) The significance of this specifically Hindu ethos with which Gandhi's, and other nationalists', ideas of womanhood and nationalism are imbued will be further explored in the second chapter.

[42] Bagchi, p. WS66.

[43] Neluka Silva, *The Gendered Nation: Contemporary Writing from South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), p. 22.

which indicate 'how the divinized Mother India becomes a focal point for many of the developing nation's contentious debates between authenticity and imitation, between tradition and modernity and religion and science, and between being essentially Hindu but aspiring simultaneously to secularity and pluralism.'[44] These critics' readings of the figure of mother-as-nation clearly elucidate Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis's early theorisation of 'the way the very project of the welfare state itself has constituted the "state subject" in a gendered way, that is as essentially male in its capacities and needs.'[45] The newly evolving masculine nation-state of India thus harnessed the maternal icon of Bharat Mata to achieve its own ends of liberation from British colonialism while placing Indian women at the peripheries of its concerns.

Using this rhetoric of the mother as powerful cultural centre with whose support and *for* whom patriotic sons fight colonialism, nationalist discourse introduced the idea of a resistant 'feminine spirit' that was particularly harnessed by Gandhi's use of indirect modes of resistance embodied in the non-violent *satyagraha* and civil disobedience movements in the early twentieth century. Gandhi proclaimed that 'woman is the incarnation of ahimsa [non-violence]. Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure?'[46] This valorisation of 'women's strengths', and particularly the *mother*'s strength, that Gandhi integrated into nationalist discourse created space for women to begin engaging in nationalist activities, and thus presented a possible site for women's agency, 'for a very old and deeply

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[44] Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 2.

[45] Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Introduction', in *Woman-Nation-State* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), pp. 1–15 (p. 6).

[46] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, 'The Voice of Truth : Complete Book Online', *Mahatma Gandhi* <https://www.mkgandhi.org/voiceoftruth/woman.htm> [accessed 13 March 2018]. Gandhi's problematic ideas about women and gender have been the focus of many works including Madhu Kishwar (1985), Radha Kumar (1993). Madhu Kishwar, 'Gandhi on Women', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XX.40 (1985), 1691–1702; Radha Kumar, pp. 81–85.

rooted ideological sanction had been obtained for growth.'[47] Colonialism (and anti-colonialism) thus not only created conditions favourable to, but also directly incited, women's agency and resistance in both the private and public spheres.

The very origins of modern Indian feminism can thus be traced to an intersectional context in which a nascent feminist consciousness is developed when women are exhorted to harness their femininity in service of the nation. This is in keeping with Radha Kumar's observation that 'a community expresses consciousness of its own oppression as a community through a protest movement in which women are acknowledged to be active; at a certain stage women apply this consciousness to questions of their oppression as a sex.'[48] And indeed, the streamlining of female agency to directly address gender issues in the early twentieth century was undertaken in the national context by early activists such as Uma Nehru who addressed the following diatribe to Indian men :

> Just the loss of national freedom has made you so depressed, so anxious, and so sorrowful. Consider then the enslavement of those who have lost not just political freedom but whose body, soul and spirit have been enchained. How can their hearts ever be joyful?[49]

The colonial period thus afforded the perfect conditions within which the contours of modern Indian femininity, its representational and agentic possibilities, as well as its complex affiliations with other discourses of nation, religion, class, caste, region, and colonialism itself, could be examined. Ultimately, feminist historians have underlined the hypocrisies of the nationalist movement (and subsequent reformist movement in Independent India, including communism and the Naxal movement) which have been informed by patriarchal anxieties of male leaders who are threatened by women's activism.[50] As Ketu H. Katrak has

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[47] Susie Tharu, 'Tracing Savitri's Pedigree: Victorian Racism and the Image of Women in Indo-Anglian Literature', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 254–68 (p. 263).

[48] Radha Kumar, p. 100.

[49] Stree Darpan (May 1918), qtd. in Talwar, p. 225.

[50] Radha Kumar, p. 94.

noted, ultimately, '[a]lthough Gandhi's movement did give women a chance to participate in a public sphere and to build solidarity, they did not organize to transform and challenge the roots of their oppression within traditional family structures.'[51] However, studying women's relationships with these larger epistemic shifts, and the roles they have played in them, brings into focus the very complex notion of female agency that this thesis is interested in exploring. It places a focus upon the negotiations women must undertake to manage their affiliations to various discourses of identity and belonging which might be ridden with conflict, so that their resistance cannot simply be defined along lines of gender, but must account for the subtle, 'everyday' forms of agency they employ from their positions at the nexus of these ideologies.

These theorisations of agency and everyday resistance that this chapter began with encourage a movement away from 'false consciousness' as an explanation for an individual's continued acquiescence or even collusion with dominant epistemes that subjugate them. And indeed, for the Indian woman, the influence of these various discourses moves beyond how they might produce conditions for female agency to also include her own interpellation within them. In the colonial period, therefore, one might find a Kundamala Debi who, interpellated into the newly formed bourgeois discourse as well as a nationalist-patriarchal discourse, exhorts newly educated upper-class women to 'give no place in your heart to *mem-sahib* like behaviour' and to instead '[s]ee how an educated woman can do housework thoughtfully and systematically in a way unknown to an ignorant, uneducated woman' in order to perform as the perfect Bengali housewife.[52] The grey middle-ground that such a view embodies, caught between the reformist impetus for women's education, the bourgeois (and of course patriarchal) impetus for a reconfiguration of the private space presided over by the

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[51] Ketu H. Katrak, 'Indian Nationalism, Gandhian "Satyagraha", and Representations of Female Sexuality', in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, ed. by Andrew Parker and others (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 395–406 (p. 400).

[52] Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 105.

education housewife, and the nationalist impetus to clearly distinguish this 'modern' Indian woman from the Englishwoman and her perceived betrayal of feminine domesticity, clearly obfuscates any intent to assign progressive values or laud radical resistance amongst the women who believe in it.

Such contradictions in the agencies and affiliations of various influential nationalist and feminist women who were deeply engaged in social transformations have been illuminated by various feminist theorists, along with their reception within Indian society which reflected their marginalisation within these various discourses.[53] Their treacherous negotiation through dichotomies of tradition versus modernity and public versus private to enact their agencies, and the patriarchal strategy of subsuming their voice, is a legacy that is inherited in the post-independence period by the Indian feminist movement, as well as the modern Indian woman.[54] A pivotal reflection of this legacy transpired in the late 1970s, when Begum Shah Bano found her assertion of her rights, through her demand for maintenance from her husband after divorce, being trampled upon by the discourses of religion and patriarchy. This signified the continued use of binaries and dichotomies (Indian/British now replaced by Hindu/ Muslim) as a means to delegitimise women's voices. In light of this portentous event which represented the gradual 'constituency of women as a communal

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[53] The works of Radha Kumar (1993), Chakravarti (1990), Talwar (1989), and Leslie A. Flemming (1994), have been especially concerned with the contradictions within the discursive framework that nationalist-feminist-activist women like Sarala Debi, Pandita Ramabai, Cornelia Sorabji, Krupabai Satthianadan and Uma Nehru had to negotiate with as they attempted to ameliorate women's conditions in the country. An example of their marginalisation within Indian society is the manner in which Pandita Ramabai's negotiation between nationalist and imperialist, feminist and patriarchal, progressive and conservative discourses left her in the position of being called a 'colonial anti-Hindu propagandist' and of being seen by Maharashtrian women 'as having destroyed her husband and her marriage, and contaminated the rest of society through her unorthodox behaviour.' (Radha Kumar, pp. 27; 44) Leslie A. Flemming, 'Between Two Worlds: Self Construction and Self-Identity in the Writings of Three Nineteenth Century Indian Christian Women', in *Women as Subjects*, ed. by Nita Kumar (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994).

[54] In 'Can the Subaltern Speak', Spivak underlines this subsuming when she notes that '[b]etween patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization.' (102) Spivak is thus concerned with the silencing of women's voices by the hegemonic discourses because of the burden of representation placed upon the Indian female figure, while she is simultaneously interpellated in the very patriarchal, imperialist, nationalist, communal, feminist and neoliberal ideologies that marginalise her.

'sign'' in modern India, the Indian feminist movement also came to reckon with its own inadequacies in creating a space that remains accessible to women from all sections and echelons of Indian society as they enact their everyday resistance within the framework of conflicting discourses of religion, community, and nation within which women remain peripheral.[55] It is this concern with the lack of adequate intersectional representation within the Indian feminist movement that this chapter will now turn towards. It will draw out the conflicts that arise from the movement, and its consequences for female agency and resistance.

The contemporary Indian feminist movement

During the Shah Bano case and its attendant call for Muslim women's right to maintenance, the contemporary feminist movement was forced to acknowledge 'that there is no such thing as a common category of women, because they are differentiated by caste, class, and community, and therefore any definition of rights has also to be based on these differentiations.'[56] This necessary fragmentation of the essentialised figure of the Indian woman also invited a questioning of the representativeness of the feminist movement itself, with dangerous consequences; through such questioning, feminists could become relegated to the role of representatives of 'modernity' and harbingers of a Western-influenced discourse on Indian womanhood, while communal discourses on Indian womanhood (represented in the 1980s through the Hindu women who supported the legalisation of *sati* (or widow burning) and the Muslim women who supported the Muslim Women's Bill that curtailed their rights to maintenance from husbands after divorce) become repositories of the 'traditional' or 'authentic' discourse on Indian womanhood. This differentiation naturally flows into a debate

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[55] Radha Kumar, p. 178.
[56] Radha Kumar, p. 168.

in which 'the individual woman [is] smothered by a newly constructed symbol of the 'real' woman' who is pitted against the feminist.[57] The feminist recognition of the space for negotiation between various discourses that every woman's context necessitates is thus ironically employed in the formation of the dichotomy between the 'real' Indian woman and the 'modern, uncultured' feminist Indian woman.

The feminist concern with a lack of representativeness thus begins at the fault line of tradition versus modernity in a religious context, which remains the most prominent point of contention as the line drawn between Indian women that remains most difficult to rupture (as we shall see in the investigation of Hindu and Muslim femininities during the Babri Masjid demolition of 1993 and Godhra riots of 2002 in the next chapter). However, this rupture continues into other forms of difference such as region, language and community that are central concerns in the face of the extreme heterogeneity of the Indian cultural milieu. Linguistic and cultural variations have meant that feminist ideas and communities have developed at different paces in different parts of the country. The movement's discourse has developed distinctly in urban centres such as Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Aurangabad. It has converged primarily at national-level conferences in these cities or when events of national significance have taken place that required concerted united effort (specifically, instances of dowry murders, and police and landlord rape, brought women's organisations together in protest 1970s onwards).[58] Additionally, affiliations to various political and feminist ideologies (liberal, Marxist, radical) present further forms of fragmentation within the movement. The Indian feminist movement is thus primarily a conglomeration of various heterogeneous factions separated by language, region, caste,

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[57] Radha Kumar, p. 171.
[58] Radha Kumar, pp. 110–11.

political affiliation etc, which reasonably poses difficulty for the movement in functioning as a cohesive front.

The primary concern raised by the issues of representation discussed so far has been the preservation of heteroglossia. While Indian feminist discourse is greatly invested in extracting historical evidence of women's agency and in creating new possibilities for female agency, its function as a historical discourse that is born from a specific location (in India, this would refer to its nationalist origins and its bourgeois-socialist location) necessitates its privileging of a certain hegemonic ideal of femininity. This represents an important aporia for the Indian feminist discourse in that, if it claimed that it could represent all Indian women, then it engages in the same essentialisation that it accuses patriarchal discourses of engaging in. On the other hand, an acceptance of its own subjectivity forces the discourse to admit that its representations of Indian womanhood are also inevitably susceptible to hegemonisation, so that certain other formulations of womanhood that cannot completely be accommodated into feminist discourse become subordinate or marginalised.

Radha Kumar has noted that the primary impetus of feminist discourse in the post-independence years was to move the idea of Indian femininity away from its strict association with roles of mother and wife, and instead to focus on the woman as a daughter and a working woman.[59] This shift allows feminist discourse to create space for women's subjectivity, in that the daughter figure represents 'the formation of a woman rather than her role' so that her static state is replaced by a sense of growth and evolution, while the working woman's figure is concerned with 'her productive rather than reproductive capacities'. Most importantly, both of these conceptualise a female subjecthood that is no longer understood in

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[59] The emergence of the latter figure is also strongly associated with the neoliberal shifts within the Indian economy that created the space for women's movement into the public sphere. It could be argued that the feminist movement chose to emphasise this role for women specifically because of the large scale shifts taking place within Indian society that foregrounded this figure.

relation to men.[60] Motherhood and wifehood thus become 'residual cultural formations' or 'subordinate femininities' in the feminist construction of Indian womanhood, while remaining dominant and hegemonic within patriarchal, communal and nationalist constructions of it. It is possible to argue then that, because of these associations, the 'mother' and 'wife' functions become imbued with a certain traditionalism associated with these latter discourses. This privileging of the daughter's subjectivity over that of the mother within the feminist movement has very specific consequences for the novels under study here, which develop a similar affinity to the daughter's perspective while the mother's voice remains at the margins. This thesis is interested in questioning such disparity in the treatment of different femininities, and the consequences it has for the movement's cohesiveness.

Another important development to be considered is the formation of a hierarchy within Indian feminism 'consisting of theory generators (usually the most articulate), activists (consciousness-raisers), and the subjects of their attention.'[61] Thus, the discourse itself creates a divide amongst women, painting feminists (both in academia and in activism) as agents of change while there is a (conscious or unconscious) creation of the category of 'other women', who become passive receptacles of feminist actions. This codifying, based upon a notion of a Derridean *différance* which necessitates the creation of the 'Other in order that the Self might gain identity', is eerily reminiscent of the early nationalist-feminist activists like Pandita Ramabai or Cornelia Sorabji who, while creditably effecting massive shifts for women in Indian society, also themselves subscribed to a dichotomous understanding of women's agency. It thus allows for the discernment of a continued 'saviour complex' that feminism inherits from its association with nationalist-activist women, who themselves inherited it from both British colonialism and Indian social reformers. In recent

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[60] Radha Kumar, p. 2.
[61] Radha Kumar, p. 112.

postcolonial and neo-colonial global contexts, such a 'saviour complex' has been theorised by Cara Cilano's study of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto who is positioned between American secularism and Pakistani Islamic culture. Cilano highlights how Bhutto 'promises to save Pakistan from brown men by saving the brown women first', particularly through her vision of a Muslim democracy that is formed through the agency of Pakistani women (led, of course, by Bhutto).[62] Lila Abu-Lughod similarly discusses the neo-colonial 'concern' of Western feminists for Afghan women in the 'War on Terrorism' after 9/11. Abu-Lughod underlines the hierarchy embedded within this concern: 'I do not think that it would be as easy to mobilize so many of these American and European women if it were not a case of Muslim men oppressing Muslim women – women of cover for whom they can feel sorry and in relation to whom they can feel smugly superior.'[63] Such Othering and the formation of binaries that assign positions of agency and passivity to different women is important to note here precisely because it manifests within the mother-daughter relationship in the novels under study in this thesis.

The hierarchy within feminism is also important in its capacity to highlight how theory-generation (or academia) is visibly ruptured from the grassroots work being conducted by feminist activists. Radha Kumar notes how, even though 'much knowledge was produced which had great significance for feminist activity,' it 'remained, by and large, disconnected from the activity itself.'[64] Feminist academia thus becomes a distinctly isolated bourgeois persuasion that is unable to effect real change; it is thus a veritable ivory tower. This

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[62] Cara Cilano, 'Saving Pakistan from Brown Men: Benazir Bhutto as Pakistan's Last Best Hope for Democracy', in *Imagining Muslims in South Asia and the Diaspora: Secularism, Religion, Representations*, ed. by Claire Chambers and Caroline Herbert (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 157–71 (p. 168).

[63] Lila Abu-Lughod, 'Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others', *American Anthropologist*, 104.3 (2002), 783–90 (p. 787). Both Cilano and Abu-Lughod are theorising such Othering in the relation to Muslim women. In the Indian context, such a feminist 'saviour complex' comes into the picture both in religious terms (with Hindu women 'saving' Muslim women from Muslim men) and class terms (upper-class women protecting working-class women).

[64] Radha Kumar, p. 152.

disconnection provides the grounds for possibly privileging certain forms of womanhood and agency that could play into the tradition/modernity dichotomy, and for a simplifying of the complex realities within which women function, so that the actions of women that contradict the discipline's reading of female agency as progressive might present a shock to the carefully devised theoretical paradigms that academics function within (as we shall see in the second chapter which records how women's participation in Hindutva particularly disrupted feminist ideas of agency).

To recognise the Indian feminist movement as a discourse that connotes a power struggle amongst women themselves might be seen as a disservice to the revolutionary capacity of a movement built on notions of equality and peace which has effected radical shifts in the status of women in India. However, the analysis of the Indian feminism here is deliberately confrontational in order to elicit a possible self-reflexive discussion of the ways in which feminism can shift to accommodate notions of womanhood that have hitherto remained undercurrents. Additionally, this is not a new impetus but one that the feminist movement has itself undertaken since the 1980s. Radha Kumar's very observation of these issues of hierarchy and dichotomy, and the focus of her entire narrative on problematising feminist ideas of agency signals a shift within feminist discourse in India. Kumar's work is at the forefront of the large body of feminist works, largely produced in the 1990s, that have articulated the observations on Indian women's agency, resistance, complex locations and negotiations that have thus far informed my argument.

These works engage in an important self-reflexive analysis of Indian feminism's failures through marking possible new avenues for both feminist theory and praxis, problematising this very dichotomy of theory/praxis, and recognising the limit of its reach to women that do not belong to the specific class/caste/geographic affiliations in which Indian feminism itself has been historically grounded. It becomes interesting then to analyse this

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rerouting of feminist concerns and to understand why, at this particular historical juncture, engagement with the issues of representation begins to develop especially in the interweaving academic 'fields' of history, sociology, anthropology, economics, politics and literature.

The significance of the temporal placement of these developments in the 1980s and 1990s can be traced not only to the events taking place in India but also to larger international epistemic reconfigurations. Particularly important here is the advent of the both postcolonialism and the Third Wave of American feminism, which were strongly undergirded by poststructuralist ideas of pluralities and subjectivities. The former also emphasised a recognition of history as non-linear, of the heteroglossia that had so far been silenced by the coercive discourses of 'the Orient' formulated in the West, and of the metanarrative of Objective Truth manufactured within academia which highlighted the ethnocentric location of the academic intellectual. These ideas were taken further by feminist writers from the 'Third World', one example of which is Chandra Talpade Mohanty's critique of 'First World' feminist privilege and the continued interpellation of feminist theorists in the West in problematic discourses of race and imperialism.[65]

The influence of these larger debates on subjectivity and plurality on Indian academia is possibly most visible in the fact of the Subaltern Studies Collective being formed in the 1980s and undertaking similar investigations into notions of everyday resistance, ambivalent subjectivities, coercive discourses that produce subaltern figures, and the location and function of the social theorist in highlighting this subalternity. The effect of both the Collective and of the international debates delineated above is in turn evident within Indian feminist studies, in works cited earlier, such as *Recasting Women* (edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid), *The History of Doing* by Radha Kumar or *Women Writing in India*

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[65] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *Feminist Review*, 30, 1988, 61–88.

(edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita). Roshan Shahani and Shoba Ghosh have noted the import of these works for the direction in which feminist theory and feminist literary criticism have since grown:

> Since the late 1980s, feminist theorists and critics in India have strained to unseat the romantic female subject who animates much of the discourse inherited from western feminism. Since Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid's *Recasting Women*, the focus has been on the 'constructedness' of femaleness within situational discourses, and the contradictions that intricately vein these constructions.[66]

While these influences can themselves be seen as significant because of the analytical tools they provided, the radical overhaul noted within the Indian feminist movement at this point can more convincingly be traced to the violent epistemic shifts taking place within Indian society itself which necessitated the use of those analytical tools to undertake an urgent project of self-reflection and reconfiguration.

Feminist theorists have noted two important causes of this overhaul, namely the rebirth of communalism and violence related to religious affiliations, and the advent of globalisation and neoliberalism. These two discourses, while seemingly dichotomous, have functioned together to effect a reconfiguration of the tradition/modernity dichotomy which, as we have seen, has been central to gender discourse in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The impact of these shifts on women and the feminist movement has been concisely captured by Indu Agnihotri and Vina Mazumdar, which warrants quoting them at length:

> In India today the most modern techniques of propaganda are used to project women as consumers and reproductive beings rather than producers; and, above all as members of one or other particular community which seeks to establish its political identity by right of birth, religion or culture. Fundamentalism provides an ideological framework while globalisation and glorification of the market provides the operative instrument to demolish women's claims to equality, freedom and dignity as individuals. This awesome combination poses a challenge which is forcing women's

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[66] Roshan G. Shahani and Shoba V. Ghosh, 'Indian Feminist Criticism: In Search of New Paradigms', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35.43/44 (2000), 3813–16 (p. 3816).

organisations into rethinking, soul-searching and questioning of their roles and identities in the reshaping of the struggle.[67]

This growth of the communalisation of identities and the introduction of a neoliberal economy will be engaged with in the next chapter, in order to analyse more deeply its impact on the discourse of Indian femininity and agency, on the Indian feminist movement, and on literary representations of women. However, as a literary thesis invested in the manifestation of these debates about female agency within the particular canon of Indian women's writing in English, it is first necessary to focus upon the politics of literary representation itself. Such a project will be undertaken here in specific relation to the texts under scrutiny in the thesis which are grouped together by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan under the label of 'bourgeois feminist fiction' to identify how such a label might interact with ideas of women's agency and resistance discussed so far.[68]

What is a 'bourgeois feminist' novel?

The term 'bourgeois feminist fiction' coined by Sunder Rajan for Anglophone, female-centric Indian literature, and its specific use of the labels 'bourgeois' and 'feminist', underlines its proximity to both the specific location and the issues of representation faced by the Indian feminist movement which have been addressed so far.[69] Through the course of her essay which introduces this term, Sunder Rajan establishes the canon of authors whose texts

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[67] Indu Agnihotri and Vina Mazumdar, 'Changing Terms of Political Discourse: Women's Movement in India, 1970s-1990s', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30.29 (1995), 1869–78 (p. 1870).

[68] Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, 'The Heroine's Progress in Recent Women's Fiction', *India International Centre Quarterly*, 23.3/4 (1996), 222–38.

[69] While these texts are usually placed under the label of 'Indian women's writing in English', this thesis utilises Sunder Rajan's label because of the opportunity it provides to investigate the class location of these novels alongside its depiction of feminism and female agency. The term 'bourgeois' as used here clearly has derogatory connotations, hinting at the novels' origins as well as commenting upon their mass appeal. The gendered nature of this 'bourgeois' labelling will be addressed later in this thesis, with particular focus on the impact of the private versus public dichotomy upon this nomenclature.

fall under the ambit of this label, mentioning the names of Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Githa Hariharan and Manjula Padmanabhan.

These texts' 'bourgeois' nature is underscored primarily, of course, by specific class affiliations. Written by and for middle-class women, the texts fit under what Tabish Khair calls 'babu' fictions, concerned evidently with the particular issues of the urban bourgeoisie to which the reader and writer, and therefore, most often, the protagonists belong. Historically, the origins of this form of fiction can be located in the shift that Sumanta Banerjee traces in women's creativity prompted by the nascent bourgeois culture of nineteenth-century Bengal, where public spectacles formed from creative collaboration within a community of women come to be replaced by the *bhadramahila* emphasis on a Western-influenced form of women's expression through writing, which requires that, as Woolf declared, 'A woman must have money and a room of her own'.[70] This private writing from the colonial period is characterised by its reformist focus on the woman's condition, and its use of high, literary Bengali that directly traces its roots to an English literary tradition. It becomes possible, then, to trace the origins of the entire form of women's bourgeois feminist fiction in India to this confluence of colonialist, bourgeois and patriarchal ideologies that sought to produce the Indian woman as a reflection of a newly formed bourgeois ethos.

Bourgeois feminist fiction thus becomes an avenue for conversation about women's conditions in Indian society, while also being a means of representing the hegemonic ideal of Indian femininity. However, in the fact that it represents a movement from communal and accessible forms of women's creative expression to one that demands from its consumer that he/she be literate, educated in the Western traditions of literature, and aware of socially

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[70] Sumanta Banerjee; Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, Penguin Classics (2000) (London, United Kingdom: Penguin, 1928), p. 6.

relevant issues, the scope of bourgeois women's literature becomes limited to the bourgeois classes, and especially to the sphere of bourgeois women.

Contemporary bourgeois feminist fiction is even further insulated in its use of the English language, which Sunder Rajan notes is a primary 'signifier of bourgeois modernity' in India.[71] The complex relationship of the colonised to the language of the coloniser has been scrutinised within postcolonial studies, especially in theorising language itself as an institutional hegemonic tool, employed through the education system by the British in India. Gauri Viswanathan's critical text *Masks of Conquest* (1989) underlined how 'no serious account of [the] growth and development [of the discipline of English] in India can afford to ignore the imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England, a mission that in the long run served to strengthen Western cultural hegemony in enormously complex ways.'[72] English language and literature thus become an important source of discursive manipulation, a tool through which 'an idea of the Orient and an ideology of racism which upheld white norms as standard and denigrated […] deviance from them' could be propagated so that, even in postcolonial India, 'the self destructive core of this venture [of reading English literature] for the Indian reader is clear.'[73] It can be inferred then that *writing* in English only magnifies this self-destruction manifold.

Studies of early Indian writing in English have often underlined the problematic positionality of the writer and their implication in the dominant colonial discourse effected by the study of the coloniser's literature. Tabish Khair recognises these texts as 'predominantly acts of admiring imitations by an elite whose reality had shifted from the immediate social context to a romantic past or to the steeples, manor houses and hedged fields of a learnt

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[71] Sunder Rajan, 'The Heroine's Progress', p. 237.
[72] Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, 25th anniversary (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 2.
[73] Tharu, p. 256.

Europe.'[74] These early texts are also inhibited by an awareness of their audience as predominantly Western readers, bearing thus the burden of representation and justification. They are caught in a violent shuttling between protest against the stereotypes of Indians (especially Indian women), and an exoticisation inevitably embedded in the very language used for expression which results in the representation of 'our country [as] the spectacle, our lives [as] a masquerade'.[75] Susie Tharu thus finds that the poet Toru Dutt, in her ballad *Savitri*, is engaged in 'claiming for her [eponymous female protagonist] Savitri the very sexual refinement, the purity, held, as always, in the virtue of women, that the British insisted Hindu society lacked.'[76]

Post-independence bourgeois feminist fiction is seen by theorists as having inherited the legacy of ambivalence from these early writings, with the colonial episteme simply being replaced by a postcolonial and globalised context. This context has created an international focus upon these writers as:

> Third World Cosmopolitans, who are globally visible, who are taught in postcolonial classrooms the world over, and who are hailed in the review pages of Western journals as interpreters and authentic voices of the non-Western world [that] hardly ever include a writer from India who does not write in English.[77]

Representation here becomes a form of privilege that the English language and its international reach bestow upon this form of fiction. This international audience, however, also remains eerily reminiscent of the colonial 'gaze' that demands the subaltern's speech or comprehensibility within its own cultural and linguistic epistemes. It thus becomes possible to trace 'some of the tensions that describe Indian English narration […] to [its] dual positioning […] as literature written by a privileged section (élite) of a once-colonized people

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[74] Khair, p. 47.

[75] Tharu, p. 261-262.

[76] Tharu, p. 260.

[77] Meenakshi Mukherjee, qtd. in Lisa Lau, 'Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals', *Modern Asian Studies*, 43.2 (2009), p. 574.

(colonial subalterns).'[78] Within the boundaries of India, Rashmi Sadana highlights the presence of duality through noting a 'disjuncture – between the language on the ground, of daily life, and literary representation' which is indicative of 'a larger schism in Indian society that has to do […] with the disparate thought worlds and hierarchies of language that saturate everyday life.'[79] Clearly, then, the Indian English literary world inhabits a position of power and privilege in both the national and global contexts.

Indian English fiction can thus be seen as arriving at a similar aporetic identity crisis that has been traced in the Indian feminist movement, because of the ambivalences of power, privilege and subalternity embedded within such an endeavour. For bourgeois feminist fiction, the matter is complicated through the inclusion of the paradigm of gender, because it allows for the female author's claiming of another 'subaltern site of enunciation *along with* [her] privileged placement in society.'[80] This gendered subalternity also introduces another dangerous ambivalence that the bourgeois feminist writer must negotiate with. Even as she undertakes the critique of Indian (primarily Hindu) patriarchies, the high visibility afforded to Indian English fiction also burdens the text with the role of representing 'India' on a global stage. It is therefore compelled to undertake some form of cultural or nationalist valorisation of 'Indian-ness', in a manner that incorporates the tradition of bourgeois postcolonial fiction sired by Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.[81] Bourgeois feminist fiction is thus engaged in a double role – '[w]hile producing "nationalist" narratives, they simultaneously address the "woman question": most often simply by employing the expedient of replacing the male protagonist of the novel by a female.'[82] The dangers of this global visibility are enumerated

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[78] Khair, p. xi.
[79] Rashmi Sadana, *English Heart, Hindi Heartland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 4.
[80] Khair, p. xiii.
[81] Here, nationalism is understood, not as the anti-colonial fervour of pre-independence India, but as its convoluted avatar that functions in opposition/ complement to the discourse of globalisation.
[82] Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, 'The Feminist Plot and the Nationalist Allegory: Home and World in Two Indian Women's Novels in English', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 39.1 (1993), p. 76.

by Maryam Mirza in her study of the representation of class relations within this canon. Mirza notes that the texts are often read through a postcolonial lens, highlighting the hegemony and subalternity of postcolonial subjects while glossing over the hierarchies present within this postcolonial state. This can lead the fiction of the privileged female authors in this canon to be 'seen as representative of the situation of all women, rich and poor, which can elide the dramatic economic differences between them.'[83]

In addition to the economic differences that Mirza highlights, another important elision caused by this canon's assumed representativeness is that of religio-cultural contexts. Elizabeth Jackson's critical study of Muslim Indian women's writing in English echoes Mirza's and resonates with this thesis's concerns with the various intersecting locations of women's identities that produce simultaneous privilege and subalternity. As Jackson argues, the Muslim authors she studies (namely, Attia Hosain, Zeenuth Futehally, Shama Futehally and Samina Ali) 'would almost certainly be from among a tiny privileged minority whose families are wealthy enough – and liberal enough – to provide an elite Western education for their daughter(s).'[84] However, the authors are of course marginalised by their religious identities as Muslims in a country whose history is marred by perennial Hindu-Muslim conflict that frequently escalates into bloodshed and violence.

Jackson's study underlines the presence of the few Muslim female authors writing in English in India over the last century. These Muslim authorial voices are absent from this thesis's study and could indicate a serious gap in its theorisations of female agency in India. However, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, this thesis studies texts written by Hindu authors that primarily represent the lives of urban bourgeois upper-caste Hindu women with the intention of highlighting the Hindu-centric nature of these texts. To do so, the thesis

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[83] Maryam Mirza, *Intimate Class Acts: Friendship and Desire in Indian and Pakistani Women's Fiction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. xvi.
[84] Elizabeth Jackson, *Muslim Indian Women Writing in English: Class Privilege, Gender Disadvantage, Minority Status* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2018), p. 2.

draws a hitherto unnoticed parallel between the subconscious Hindu atmosphere that suffuses Indian feminism as well as this canon of texts. It explores the rapid growth of radical Hindutva politics in India and the resultant discomfort of both Indian Hindu feminists and Indian Hindu female novelists. It analyses the attempts made by these authors to represent intersectionality and allyship with minorities who face violence and marginalisation in a Hindu majority country, namely Muslim and Dalit citizens. Thus, aside from Jackson's comprehensive exploration of Muslim Anglophone novels in India, the thesis's contracted focus on Hindu authors hopes to use this fixed lens to interrogate the canon of Hindu bourgeois feminist fiction and to disrupt a supposition of its representativeness of identities marginalised in terms of religion, caste, as well as class.

The identity crisis caused by such a lack of representativeness in this particular canon of bourgeois feminist fiction (reflected as narrative anxiety[85], or as Tabish Khair terms it, alienation) can thus be traced to its origins in a framework of influences that are necessarily contradictory. Historically, this writing is a female-centric literature about women's conditions that originated from a patriarchal concern about men losing control over women; a literature concerned with representing a 'native' culture under colonisation (and now, a 'Third World' culture under neo-colonial globalisation) that also utilises the colonial language and colonial literary tradition for expression; a literature that stemmed from a socialist desire for reform but remains restricted to bourgeois concerns and a bourgeois audience. It thus has an especial investment in the dichotomies of tradition versus modernity, public versus private, home versus world and male versus female since its very beginnings

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[85] This thesis aims to excavate the traces of this anxiety within the female-centred narratives of novelists Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, and Manju Kapur, through a focus upon their representation of peripheral mother characters who are read here as reflecting the text's discomfort with the varied forms of agency and resistance that must necessarily be included within a novel about women's lives, while navigating the various dichotomies that present as particularly rigidified when read into the mother/daughter dyad.

are entrenched in debates and tensions relating to these dichotomies in colonial and postcolonial India.

These ambivalences embedded within bourgeois Anglophone feminist fiction have resulted in equally ambivalent and anxious responses towards these works within literary criticism. On the one hand, as Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, these texts have been popularly included in syllabi for postcolonial literature both in India and abroad, which might hint at their critical acclaim. On the other hand, they have been derided by some feminist critics as 'safe, negotiable texts locked within personalised middle class worlds and feed[ing] into conventional oppositions of 'private' and 'public'.'[86] Susie Tharu associates this claustrophobic environment, within which not just the bourgeois feminist narrative but all Indian English writing functions, to the contradiction presented by 'the squalor and depravity they see around, a present reality that in no way matches the perfection of the recreated past.' She emphasises these authors' alienation:

> clutching the bloated particulars of a decadent culture [while they] remain as exiled as ever from the lives of the people, writer-intellectuals withdraw. They become cynical, engrossed in their interior landscapes and the oppressive lack of a future that defines their experience. Their work is proper, the themes small, their hands clean.[87]

This discernment of their disengagement from the complex realities that envelop them is particularly troubling to the feminist critic, since the bourgeois feminist text's very claim to the 'feminist' label is embedded in its capacity for resistance, both in the act of its writing and its treatment of its female characters' agency. The most influential studies of representations of Indian women's agency have therefore steered clear of bourgeois feminist fiction, instead focusing on works in Indian languages. This is best represented in the fact that Susie Tharu and K. Lalita's path breaking anthology of Indian women's writing sparsely engages with Anglophone writing while also declaring their explicit intent to valorise

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[86] Shahani and Ghosh, p. 3814.
[87] Tharu, p. 268.

'radical' resistance by reading their texts 'not for the moments in which they collude with or reinforce dominant ideologies of gender, class, nation or empire, but for the gestures of defiance or subversion implicit in them.'[88] The works of some of the authors included in the anthology such as Mahasweta Devi (Bengali), Ismat Chugtai (Urdu), Lalithambika Antherjanam (Malayalam), and Krishna Sobti (Hindi) have since become popular choices for reading resistance in Indian women's writings. Similarly, Kumkum Sangari chooses to illustrate her conceptualisation of incitement through a study of the ancient epic *Mahabharata*'s villainous mother figure, Kaikeyi.[89]

Roshan Shahani and Shoba Ghosh have suggested that the primary barrier in the serious theorisation of agential representation in bourgeois feminist fiction so far has been precisely its ambivalent location. The privileged position that this author writes from, and the Anglophone reader reads from, allows these texts to be subsumed under the category of 'mainstream feminism' (placed in opposition with a presumably 'radical' feminism that is not considered palatable to the masses, and presents forms of rebellion that violently rupture the hegemonic patriarchal formation). The use of the term 'bourgeois' juxtaposed with 'feminism' thus also holds connotations of a commercialised feminism, which Shahani and Ghosh comment upon in their derision towards the proliferation of this genre which, '[i]n keeping with the market-management of culture, […] is published and marketed with as much financial astuteness as fashion shows.'[90] This commercialisation thus prevents these texts from fitting the criteria for 'alternative feminist criticism which attempts to look at women's writing as writing from the margin.'[91]

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[88] Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, 'Introduction', in *Women Writing in India Volume I: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 39.
[89] Kumkum Sangari, 'Consent, Agency and the Rhetorics of Incitement', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28.18 (1993), 867–82.
[90] Shahani and Ghosh, p. 3814.
[91] Shahani and Ghosh, p. 3815.

This, of course, echoes the issue that resistance studies as well as feminist studies have noted, of looking for the always marginal, always resistant subaltern figure. It does not allow for a deeper engagement with the spaces of collusion and a recognition of the ambivalent positioning of women, whether as writers, readers, or representations in fiction. It is these interstices within feminist criticism in India that this thesis is attempting to redress, through bringing the rigorous work on agency by the theorists that Shahani and Ghosh have credited with 'theoretically rigorous, politically committed and nuanced work' to a study of Anglophone bourgeois feminist fiction so as to underline the complex amalgamation of consent, agency, resistance and incitement present in this writing through a focus upon the narrative anxieties betrayed through the text's use of perspective, its speech formations, and narrative lines assigned to peripheral mother figures. This agential complexity in a canon that is singled out for its restriction within a world defined by privileges of class, caste and religion allows it to become the oddly perfect specimen in which to examine the shifts that take place in Indian feminism, and its conceptions of women's solidarity, over three decades, precisely because of the association of each with the bourgeoisie.[92]

While the reading of the term 'bourgeois feminist fiction' so far has focused upon the first term 'bourgeois', and related ideas of class and privilege, the second term, 'feminist', poses more complicated and interesting reflections upon notions of agency, especially in light of critical reactions to these texts as not being resistant enough. Why does Sunder Rajan characterise these texts as 'feminist' when they are also, contradictorily, considered too small or private? Is it a category that the authors themselves see their texts (or their own beliefs) as being well-suited to fit? Of the authors studied in this thesis – Shashi Deshpande, Anita

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[92] Both the texts as well as the history of the feminist movement, when studied in the context of agency, clearly privilege ideas (and shifts in these ideas) within a privileged bourgeois context. Notions of public and private in this context differ widely from that which can be applied to working class women who have inhabited public spaces since before the shifts brought about by neoliberalism, with it being bourgeois women who receded, as Sumanta Banerjee has noted, into the private sphere.

Desai, Githa Hariharan, and Manju Kapur – only Deshpande proclaims herself to be a feminist in a 2003 essay in which she notes that 'it took me years to say even to myself 'I am a feminist'.'[93] However, she still goes on, in a different essay from the collection, to underline that her fiction itself is not linked with feminist theory or 'a class called 'women',' but is focused upon the narration of an individual story.[94] Desai, in multiple interviews, has firmly refused to consider herself or her texts as feminist.[95] Hariharan has stated in an interview that 'my novels, stories and essays are not feminist tracts'.[96] Finally, Kapur herself has underlined the ambivalence in her work (specifically, her novel *Home*, published in 2006) where the 'ending has been read […] as a betrayal of feminist ideals,' an accusation which Kapur does not vociferously defend against.[97] This refusal has been particularly influenced by the authors' perception of a reduction of their works to 'women's writing' such that it is marginalised, 'framed and exhibited as a separate, distinct category' and derided as marketable in 'transform[ing] this newly gained subjecthood into a commodity.'[98] The authors' dissociation from the label, of course, does not necessarily mean the text (or even their personal lives) are completely devoid of any feminist inclinations.[99] However, the

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[93] Shashi Deshpande, 'Why I Am A Feminist', in *Writing From the Margin and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2003), p. 83.

[94] Shashi Deshpande, 'In First Person', in *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2003), pp. 1–29 (p. 10).

[95] Corinne Demas Bliss, 'Against the Current: A Conversation with Anita Desai', *The Massachussetts Review*, 29.3 (1988), 521–37 (p. 524); Anita Desai, qtd. in Harveen Sachdeva Mann, '"Going in the Opposite Direction": Feminine Recusancy in Anita Desai's "Voices in the City"', *ARIEL*, 23.4 (1992), 75–95 (p. 93).

[96] Nichole L. Reber, 'Githa Hariharan Talks Indian Femme Fatales and Politics', *Ploughshares*, 2016 <http://blog.pshares.org/index.php/indian-authors-femme-fatales-and-political-themes-stir-up-controversy/> [accessed 27 March 2018].

[97] Alex Tickell, 'An Interview with Manju Kapur', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 51.3 (2015), 340–50 (p. 341). Kapur also clarifies that she does not consider the novel 'anti-feminist [or] in favour of the status quo' (341); however, a 'feminist' label is not sought or celebrated and in fact, the protagonist's acquiescence to her patriarchal duties as wife and mother is defended.

[98] Jasbir Jain, 'Feminist Writing and the Question of Readership', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 6.2 (2009), 221–32 (p. 223).

[99] This particular canon of novels is marked its mass readership and its specifically female audience, which further contextualises its label of 'women's writing' that encompasses not only the female author, but also the female reader. The mass appeal of the novels is credited by feminist critics to the canon's disinterest in 'radical' resistance, and a concurrent condonement of continued patriarchal hegemony. The authors' disavowal of the label 'feminist' could then perhaps also be linked to the radical connotations of the label, which might alienate a mass (and homegrown) readership that might consider 'feminism' a Western imposition upon Indian 'values'.

interest here is in the texts' being labelled 'feminist' by critics who then go on to criticise their not being 'feminist enough'.

The essay in which Sunder Rajan coins the term is concerned with the heroine's 'progress', defined as 'the degree of her independence from the family [and] her participation in the world that lies outside it,' resulting in an evaluation of when and how 'women are able to *successfully* resist their victimization', an agenda which the essay itself acknowledges as being 'problematic' and 'naïve' in the possible connotation that 'it is inherently "more" feminist, and hence politically acceptable to show successful female resistance in fiction'.[100] Sunder Rajan's analysis thus engages in a 'certification of resistances,' which is carried further by other critics, like Shahani and Ghosh who criticise the bourgeois feminist texts' often ambiguous endings that leave the reader in doubt of the protagonist's having extracted herself from her misogynistic family circle and entered any new discourse of independence or self-reliance.[101] Such endings are characterised as dated (deriving from the 60s/70s confessional mode of Doris Lessing or Iris Murdoch), and as 'so politically correct, so non-threatening that [they] can reach out [...] readily to the large upwardly mobile, English-speaking elite.'[102]

These criticisms thus identify with a rigid private/ public dichotomy (and a particular celebration of women who make it to the latter sphere), reading characters in bourgeois feminist fiction as being embedded in a false consciousness from which they are expected to break free, and thus betraying the feminist supposition that Saba Mahmood critiques in her anthropological study of women's roles in the Islamic revival in Cairo, that 'women [...] supporters [of a patriarchal/ religious discourse] are pawns in a grand patriarchal plan, who, if

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[100] Sunder Rajan, 'The Heroine's Progress', p. 224.

[101] Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Recovering the Subject Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies*, 22.1 (1988), 189–224 (p. 223).

[102] Shahani and Ghosh, p. 3814.

freed from their bondage, would naturally express their instinctual abhorrence for the traditional […] mores used to enchain them.'[103] They do not allow for the possibility that women often choose to remain in that maligned private sphere because they might find agency within hegemonic patriarchal bounds, and effect small resistances and negotiations within this system (as studies of everyday resistance explored above have showcased), rather than breaking entirely free of these discursive bounds or resisting from outside them.

One might allow that these are, importantly, allegations levelled against these texts at the turn of the millennium, since when the 'feminist' label for a text, and what it can encompass, has arguably grown more nuanced.[104] However, Sunder Rajan's concern with how we define a 'feminist text', and its relationship with 'successful female resistance' brings us to a key point of rumination for this thesis. Does a feminist text necessarily require its characters (particularly its protagonist) to be hyper-agentic and radically resistant? Does it necessarily command a narrative of resistance or revolt against patriarchy? Or does it instead focus upon the suffering and subjugation of women under patriarchal restrictions, and in its articulation of this reality, comprise a feminist resistance?

In her article 'Theses on the Feminist Novel', writer Roxane Gay acknowledges the impossibility of any consensus on how to define a feminist novel since 'there's little consensus about what makes a novel a novel'.[105] Gay does go on, however, to list certain

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[103] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 1–2.

[104] It is also important here to note the context in which Sunder Rajan argues for a movement away from the traditional 'family-nature-civilization metonymy' which she links directly to 'the fundamentalist right' (236), and towards a western modernity that seems to provide escape from a sphere that has been co-opted by radical religion. This giving in to a rudimentary traditional/modern dichotomy seems to suggest a moment in Indian feminism where there is an abandonment of any attempt to redefine traditional forms of women's agency and an embracing of what feminism was already derogatorily associated with – a Western-influenced modernity. This thesis is concerned with whether such an abandonment of the 'traditional' and the 'private' exacerbates the alienation of women from the feminist cause if they find that it requires a complete disavowal of the traditional hegemony. Sunder Rajan's exhortation for radical resistance from the protagonist also seems to flatten the complex and resilient nature of patriarchy that is insidious also within the 'modernity' that is associated here with feminism. The second chapter in particular is deeply concerned with these ideas. Sunder Rajan, 'The Heroine's Progress'.

[105] Roxane Gay, 'Theses on the Feminist Novel', *Dissent*, 61.4 (2014), 45–48 (p. 45).

important characteristics: that 'the concerns of women and womanhood are the alpha and omega of the narrative' (but notes that not all books about the lives of women are feminist); that it 'illuminates some aspect of the female condition and/or offers some kind of imperative for change and/or makes a bold or unapologetic political statement in the best interests of women'; that it 'explores the question of *identity*' (emphasis in original); that it does not shy away from discomfort.[106] Gay seems to focus here upon two important concepts: that women's lives are central to the narrative, and that a possibility of change (whether near or far, radical or small) is presented. In focusing upon the female condition, the text might emphasise suffering ('how the author and her characters have bled onto the page') and/or resistance (it 'allows for hope and the possibility of a better world, even if that hope is shrouded in darkness').[107] Any and all of the abovementioned agentic possibilities can be included, then, in my readings of a text as feminist.[108]

In the particular instances of the critical readings mentioned above, it is the idea of agency and resistance that subsumes their reading of the 'bourgeois feminist text' as not 'feminist enough'. The protagonist is understood as being too passive, too restricted, as giving in easily to patriarchal dogmas and pressures that surround her, thus undertaking an incomplete resistance, which does not attempt strongly enough to disrupt the hegemonic patriarchal discourse or cause any seismic shifts in the way we understand Indian womanhood, wifehood or motherhood. Such a definition of agency also falls prey to the assumption that 'human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms and not those that uphold them'.[109] It does not account for the discursive negotiations that Deshpande

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[106] Gay, pp. 45–47.

[107] Gay, pp. 47–48.

[108] Gay also presents an interesting alternative to the reticence of the authors discussed here in accepting the 'feminist' label. She states that her novel *The Untamed State* has been read by others as a feminist novel, a fact that she accepts and reinforces in retrospect, though it was not her intention while she wrote it. Gay thus also opens the paradigms to allow a pondering over who has the authority to declare a text as being feminist.

[109] Mahmood, p. 5. Such an assumption of course moves beyond the meaning of 'agency' simply as 'action' to instead assign moral value to the term.

highlights in noting her characters' contradictions which are often questioned by critics who ask:

> 'Why do your women stay within marriages? Why do they not walk out? Why do they compromise? […] why aren't your women feminists? Why is it, I was asked, by an academic, that your women, who are so troubled by patriarchy, who suffer under patriarchy, don't rebel?'[110]

While these critics have focused on ideas of agency, a large and entirely different body of criticism on these texts, spread over many decades, has continually valorised these texts' representation of the generically defined 'suffering and sacrifice of the downtrodden Indian women.'[111] In fact, one critic goes so far as to present Deshpande's fiction as 'the most detailed and competent record of gender injustice in contemporary India.'[112] There is thus a valorisation of 'brave feminine sacrifice' that echoes the expected passivity of the Indian woman in colonial times noted above, which does not present any solution (radical or otherwise) to the injustices which she suffers. The prevalence of such readings is commented upon by Shahani and Ghosh in noting 'the barrage of 'feminist' theses being churned out in University English departments' under titles such as 'The Theme of Oppression in…' or 'The Recovery of Self in…' one or many of these bourgeois feminist texts, which they explicitly contrast against the critical work of Kumkum Sangari, Susie Tharu and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan that is concerned with more radical ideas of agency and resistance.[113]

Critics' opinions on the representation of agency (or lack thereof) in these texts therefore seem caught in an aporia that endorses either the depiction of women's strong resistance, or their extreme passivity. It is to bypass this aporia that this thesis suggests a shift

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[110] Shashi Deshpande, *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2003), pp. 158–59.

[111] Tina Grobin, 'The Development of Indian English Post-Colonial Women's Prose', *Acta Neophilologica*, 44.1–2 (2011), 93–101 (p. 94).

[112] Viney Kirpal, qtd. in M. Rajagopalachary and B. Krishnaiah, 'Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence: A Feminist Perspective', in *Mapping English: Recent Studies in Language and Literature*, ed. by K. Damodar Rao (New Delhi: Authorspress, 2016), pp. 226–40 (p. 226).

[113] Shahani and Ghosh, p. 3815.

in focus from the protagonist (whose actions are arguably at the centre of such an aporetic debate) to the characters that inhabit the peripheries of the narrative, whose agencies have not been subjected so far to the same scrutiny by critics, and who seem more easily to inhabit a liminal space that allows for a woman to negotiate between possibilities of resistance to and complicity with patriarchal discursive frameworks. By focusing upon older female characters who undertake mothering roles in these texts as the central axis through which the protagonists' motivations, narrative structure, as well as the texts' attitudes towards their contexts can be determined, I move away from reading these more traditional characters as unidimensional foils to the protagonist and, in fact, find that these texts present a prism of agentic possibilities through these women.

Additionally, the complexities of these characters' agencies often showcase the fact that women's agentic capacities (within these texts, as also without) do not necessarily contribute to progressive or feminist forms of liberation. Particularly in the third chapter, where the focus is upon women's 'villainous' agency, a strong link is possible to the realisation amongst feminists in the 1980s, as Radha Kumar notes, that women's agencies might be channelled to fulfil agendas that result in either their own or other women's oppression, thus highlighting the intersectional locations (particularly of caste, class and religion) that women inhabit which influence and complicate their agencies beyond a singular axis from feminist to patriarchal.[114] The representation of such complex intersectional locations and its impact upon how women utilise their agencies is once again particularly visible in the peripheral female character, rather than the protagonist.

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[114] Radha Kumar, p. 179.

The peripheral mother

In an individual character's *bildungsroman*, the mother is often the primary peripheral character. Both her presence (positive or negative) and her absence play a significant role in the development of the protagonist's life and narration. Jo Malin, in her text *The Voice of the Mother*, notes that the autobiographies of many female authors such as Virginia Woolf, Sara Suleri, Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde 'contain an intertext, an embedded narrative, which is a biography of the writer/daughter's mother.'[115] Malin reads these texts as blurring the boundaries between biography (of the mother) and autobiography (of the daughter) so that the texts are defined essentially by 'conversations or dialogues between a mother and a daughter'.[116]

The female *bildungsroman* narratives being studied in this thesis, while fictional and thus different from the autobiographies Malin analyses, present a similar intertext of a mother's narrative embedded within the daughter-protagonist's. One of the texts' central concerns is thus the relationship between mothers and daughters. While the figure of the mother has been central within the Indian cultural imagination, and motherhood has been valorised, as noted above, through Hindu goddess (Devi) worship, through nationalist discourses surrounding Mother India, and through veneration of the mother in art (including mythological stories like Krishna-Yashoda, various folk songs, and early post-independent Indian cinema),[117] it is clear in these sources that her worth is determined particularly in relation to sons. Sudhir Kakar, in his historic and oft-quoted psychoanalytic study of the Indian family in the 1970s, noted that the Indian collective consciousness upholds 'a religious

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[115] Jo Malin, 'Introduction', in *The Voice of the Mother: Embedded Maternal Narratives in Twentieth-Century Women's Autobiographies* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), pp. 1–14 (p. 1).
[116] Malin, p. 2.
[117] Anu Aneja and Shubhangi Vaidya, *Embodying Motherhood: Perspectives from Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Sage, 2016). Aneja and Vaidya, over the course of several chapters, explore the various connotations of motherhood in the Indian context through goddess iconography, literature and Hindi cinema, with reflections upon the impact of both nationalist and capitalist discourses on these conceptions of motherhood.

and historical tradition which […] views the birth of a male child as an essential step in the parents' and the family's salvation.'[118] This male child is to become the mother's saviour, since 'he literally marks her with the signifier of his paternal lineage and allows entry into her husband's family', in which she previously held inferior status as a wife.[119]

In contrast, the relationship between mothers and daughters is blemished by the relative lack of social value placed upon the birth of a daughter, and often restricted to passing on the legacy of patriarchal rites of womanhood, in keeping with 'the Freudian triangular structure of father, mother, son in which mother and daughter are effaced.'[120] In focusing upon the relationship between mothers and daughters, the bourgeois feminist text then seems to resist convention and to write against the grain, by occupying and filling in the 'curious silence on the thematic of mother-daughter relationships' within Indian literature.[121]

The female *bildungsroman* and its preoccupation with the protagonist's mother figures can in fact be noted as a central feature of 'bourgeois feminist fiction' that does not appear as frequently in previous works by female authors writing in English.[122] The elucidation of a woman's experiences in itself is not, of course, a new development, especially since there are important historical predecessors of this genre in the nineteenth century such as Krupabai Satthianadan's semi-autobiographical novels, *Saguna* (1887) and

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[118] Sudhir Kakar, 'Mothers and Infants', in *The Inner World: A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 89. It is significant that Kakar's own psychoanalytic study of a child's development into adulthood is related only through the lens of the male child. The female child's development is presented as a precursor to her marriage and motherhood (as the mother of sons).

[119] Radhika Mohanram, 'The Problems of Reading: Mother-Daughter Relationships and Indian Postcoloniality', in *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th-Century Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth Brown-Guillory (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), pp. 20–37 (p. 31).

[120] 'Introduction', in *Textual Mothers/ Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures*, ed. by Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), pp. 1–30 (p. 8).

[121] Mohanram, p. 20.

[122] This observation is restricted to fiction written in English since, as Priyamvada Gopal notes, the domestic genre of fiction is one in which 'the anglophone [novel] is eclipsed in volume and, often, in quality, by writing in other Indian languages.' (139) It is also noted that the origins of this fiction in India lie at the end of the nineteenth century, particularly in regional languages, with Satthianadan's work serving as an important exception in its being written in English. (39) Gopal, *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History, and Narration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Kamala (1894). Since the 1950s, however, authors like Nayantara Sahgal and Kamala Markandaya focused on representing a newly post-independent India that is often sketched through the eyes of a male protagonist, or a female protagonist who does not belong to the urban middle classes. Their oeuvres are read as representing the social and political preoccupations of Indians, as visible in Jasbir Jain's comment that Sahgal's work encompasses 'a wide sweep as she interweaves political issues with feminist ones', a fact that Jain connects to Sahgal's being a 'child of Gandhi's India.'[123]

These authors thus rarely present fiction that centres upon a middle class woman's experiences, with each author publishing only one or two texts that fulfil such criteria. It is in fact Anita Desai's early work – her first three novels *Cry the Peacock* (1963), *Voices in the City* (1965) and *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975) – that begin to articulate a middle-class woman's consciousness through a *bildungsroman* structure that is often also preoccupied with the mother figure, and therefore become the first texts to belong to this particular canon of texts. As critic R.K. Dhawan notes, Desai 'ushered in a new era of psychological realism in this genre with her novel *Cry, the Peacock* in 1963.' Desai is thus seen as a modernist writer, apposed often with Virginia Woolf, against the social realism of Markandaya, Sahgal and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala.[124] This tradition of the private female *bildungsroman* (and its attendant biography of the mother intertwined with the daughter's) is sustained through the 1980s and 1990s into the new millennium by new authors like Deshpande, Hariharan and Kapur, alongside Desai.[125]

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[123] Jasbir Jain, 'Indian Feminisms: The Nature of Questioning and the Search for Space in Indian Women's Writing', in *Writing Women Across Cultures* (Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2002), pp. 116–33 (p. 120).

[124] R.K. Dhawan, 'Introduction: Indian Women Novelists', in *Indian Women Novelists*, ed. by R.K. Dhawan (New Delhi: Prestige, 1991), I, 7–26 (p. 12).

[125] While the authors that follow Desai undertake the thematic project of the female *bildungsroman*, they do not necessarily write in the same modernist tradition. The texts under study here have been variously understood as realist, modernist, postmodernist or historical narratives, with no critical consensus on their form. These fluidities in the authors' styles agree with critic Viney Kirpal's contention that 'although the Indian novel has been influenced by the dominant literary trends and theories prevalent in the west, novelists have invariably

The canon of bourgeois feminist texts can also be understood as resistant in its writing against the tradition of veneration of the mother figure, through its retrieving of a complex relationship between mother and daughter. Maithreyi Krisharaj notes that in contemporary Indian English literature, 'mothers are not the self-sacrificing angels but are made of flesh and blood; beings who face contradictory pulls.'[126] The texts thus allow mothering to be seen, not as a primordial or instinctive function for women, or as 'the embodiment of sacrifice and nobility,' but as a performed social role that women inhabit, and in which they have to make choices.[127] In fact, it is the daughter's perspective that allows for the inclusion of such complexity, since, as Kakar noted already in his 1978 psychoanalytic study, the 'idealized image of the 'good mother' is largely a male construction. Women do not sentimentalize their mothers in this way.'[128] The presentation of this complexity is the location in which the daughter-centric texts of bourgeois feminist fiction are often able to focus upon the mother as a complex figure, encompassing both resistance and collusion to patriarchal norms.

The exploration of these mother characters in bourgeois feminist texts (and the literary criticism surrounding it) does, however, remain relatively superficial, with the mothers primarily functioning as contrasts or foils to the daughters. Any study of characters functioning at the peripheries of the text is affected from the very beginning by a dearth, both in volume and depth of representation, in the primary material in which any such reading can be anchored. As critic Bruce Robbins notes in his study of another common trope in fiction, the figure of the servant, these characters are marred by the repetitiveness, fragmentariness

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adapted them or chosen out of them eclectically to suit representations of their society.' Viney Kirpal, qtd. by W.S. Kottiswari, *Postmodern Feminist Writers* (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2008), p. 91.

[126] Maithreyi Krishnaraj, *Motherhood in India: Glorification Without Empowerment?* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 5.

[127] Veena Poonacha, 'Preface', in *Motherhood in India: Glorification without Empowerment*, ed. by Maithreyi Krishnaraj (London: Routledge, 2010), p. viii.

[128] Kakar, p. 96.

and marginality of their depictions, so that 'getting it on the map at all means foregoing the completeness of the "reading" and forcing the literary canon off-center.'[129]

Mother characters admittedly do not inhabit the same marginal status as servant characters, particularly in narratives infused with psychoanalytic principles that emphasise the impact of childhood trauma upon the protagonist's adult tribulations, and often feature the mother character as a source of such trauma. There are, however, a number of points of comparison, beginning in the fact that representations of both sets of characters are influenced in particular ways by pre-existing tropes which allow them to function as foils to the protagonist and remain devoid of intricate subjectivity. As Robbins notes of servant figures, 'the considerable textual space allotted to them is filled with much the same repertory of […] gestures and devices'.[130] For mother figures in Indian 'bourgeois feminist fiction', their tropes within the narrative seem to primarily encompass functions of villainy and of nostalgia. Through both these tropes, they operate as a source of identity for the protagonist, either through defining herself in opposition to the mother figure, or through identification with her.

This trope function allows also for the peripheral figure's inert position within literature. Robbins notes the particularly static nature of the servant figure across history, which 'between Homer and Virginia Woolf […] has not undergone proportional changes'.[131] The characteristics attributed to the mother figures in these texts are similarly based in common cultural tropes that can be traced in texts ranging from ancient Hindu mythological sources (such as the figure of the evil mother/ step-mother Kaikeyi in the Ramayana, defined

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[129] Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. xii.
[130] Robbins, p. 6.
[131] Robbins, p. x.

by a critic as 'the very antithesis of ideal motherhood'[132]) to contemporary television serials and cinema. This figure is then also immensely intertextual, drawing from a long tradition of representations that also hold wider connotations of social hierarchies, particularly of women's functions in society. They thus become what Robbins effectively describes as a 'permanent residue' upon the text, 'always already anachronistic' and strongly affiliated with 'precedent, convention, self-conscious literariness.'[133]

The final and central point of comparison between these tropes is the impact of re-aligning the narrative as well as the canon of texts to focus upon this peripheral character, which helps us grapple with and unravel particular aporias in these readings. It presents, as Robbins states, an important means of 'revaluing the canon' in order to 'refocus a history whose motion has carried it out of the traditional frame' and to discover new prisms of analysis – here, it serves for the re-evaluation of representations of female agency.[134]

The peripheral characters in 'bourgeois' feminist texts, however, have not been deeply explored within literary criticism apart from their function as unidimensional foils to the protagonist.[135] Studies about mothers in this canon have instead deeply explored its representations of mothers as *protagonists*. Elizabeth Jackson's *Feminism and Contemporary Indian Women's Writing* includes a chapter on motherhood that studies the ideology of motherhood as represented in the novels of Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, and Shashi Deshpande, with a particular focus on these authors' critique of domestic

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[132] Prabha Krishnan, 'In the Idiom of Loss: Ideology of Motherhood in Television Serials – Mahabharata and Ramayana', in *Motherhood in India: Glorification Without Empowerment*, ed. by Maithreyi Krishnaraj (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 136.

[133] Robbins, p. 34.

[134] Robbins, pp. xii; 137.

[135] Some examples of such readings of peripheral characters are Ramesh Kumar Gupta, 'Image of Woman in Shashi Deshpande's Novel Roots and Shadows', *Poetcrit*, 15 (2002), 41–47; Vincent Aerathu, 'The Girl Is Mother: Girl Children in Shashi Deshpande's Select Novels', in *Critical Studies on Contemporary Indian English Women Writers* (New Delhi: Sarup, 2010), pp. 139–50; K.K. Sunalini, 'The Image of Woman in The Dark Holds No Terrors', in *Mapping English: Recent Studies in Language and Literature*, ed. by Damodar Rao (New Delhi: Authorspress, 2016).

expectations and their portrayals of maternal ambivalence.[136] While Jackson presents a short exploration of the protagonists' relationships with their own mothers (specifically in Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* which this thesis will analyse in Chapter 3), the chapter largely engages with the protagonists' struggles to fulfil the patriarchal ideal of the self-sacrificing maternal figure.

Another important work is Indrani Karmakar's *Maternal Fictions: Writing the Mother in Indian Women's Fiction* which is the first book-length study of the representations of motherhood in Indian women's writing. Karmakar brings together feminist literary studies in India and global motherhood studies to analyse the portrayal of maternal ambivalence of mother-protagonists who grapple with 'often-irreconcilable conflicts between maternity and women's other identities.'[137] Importantly, the book engages with both Dalit motherhood and Muslim motherhood, thus giving prominence to hitherto neglected aspects of maternal representation in Indian fiction, and it does so by including translated works as well as varied forms of fiction (short stories and novels). This makes evident the politics of genre and language that affect women's literary production in the Indian context. It also allows Karmakar to disrupt existing stereotypes of maternal representation through finding, for example, that 'the conflation of motherhood with quiet domesticity […] [is] powerfully disrupted by the Dalit mothers who are active breadwinners.'[138]

The broad scope of Karmakar's literary analysis that encompasses urban bourgeois fiction by Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai alongside translated work about rural subaltern women by Mahasweta Devi and Salma, and diasporic representation by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Thrity Umrigar, echoes the text's broad focus upon disrupting master

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[136] Elizabeth Jackson, 'Motherhood and Other Work', in *Feminism and Contemporary Indian Women's Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 84–110.
[137] Indrani Karmakar, *Maternal Fictions: Writing the Mother in Indian Women's Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2022), p. 23.
[138] Karmakar, p. 15.

narratives of motherhood in all its varied forms. Within such varied readings of the maternal, Karmakar dedicates one chapter to mother-daughter relationships in recognition of the dearth of scholarly focus upon these relationships when they have abounded in more recent Indian fiction. The chapter presents interesting readings of Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* (another text that this thesis will analyse, in Chapter 4) and Salma's *Women, Dreaming*, focusing on matrilinies, matrophobia, inter-class and intergenerational solidarity, and the complex ambivalence present in the mother-daughter bonds that vacillate between patriarchal and feminist forms of mothering. All of these important themes are elements that this thesis wishes to explore further.

My argument in this thesis diverges from Karmakar's analysis primarily through its concentrated focus on mother-daughter relationships throughout, with a particularly tilted look at peripheral mothers of daughter-protagonists. While Karmakar's chapter is interested in textual mothers mothering daughters, my thesis is interested in textual daughters representing their mother figures' agencies. This subtle difference is insisted upon here because of its relevance to the contexts within which I examine these texts, namely the rise of Hindutva and the advent of neoliberalism (both of which are explored in depth in Chapter 2). Moving away from maternal ambivalence and instead focusing upon the *daughterly* ambivalence towards her mother figures' agency allows me to draw parallels to the uncomfortable relationship of feminist theorisation of resistance with women who present decidedly un-feminist forms of agency. The representation of such *peripheral* mothers is not the focus of Karmakar's study, and has in fact not been explored in depth by literary critics of this canon of fiction. Any focus on peripheral characters at all has been interested in their function as foil to the central protagonist.

Sunder Rajan's essay on the heroine's progress refers in passing to the female cousin of Deshpande's protagonist in *That Long Silence* (1989), to recognise her as the obvious

'scapegoat "other",'[139] and to also recognise the text's 'compellingly realistic' representation of a network of women from different generations, classes and circumstances that form the backdrop of 'feminine solidarity' for protagonist Jaya's navigation of her identity.[140] A different part of the analysis, in its reading of a peripheral mother character, presents this mother as a synecdoche for the family structure which 'distorts and represses women's desire' to then lead them to 'perpetuate patriarchy's dominion'.[141] This synecdochic association between the mother and the patriarchal family structure is central to the treatment of mother figures as the symbol of that which the protagonist is attempting to escape when the narrative is read as being infused with notions of unilateral movement towards 'liberation' or a fight 'against' a patriarchal society, thus placing the women in the binary positions that will be explored in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

In a manner similar to Sunder Rajan, another critic, Lisa Lau, reads the attempts of the protagonists of four texts published in the 2000s to remove themselves from the familial sphere, and develop 'a more autonomous identity through work and careers' in a post-liberalisation India.[142] The analysis largely presents an abstract or unidentified 'family' which attempts to limit the young woman's agency and movement. However, as Lau analyses Manju Kapur's novel *Home*, the inhibitor is specifically recognised as being embodied by the 'women in the family', that is the mother and aunts. Lau reads these women's resistance to one of their own striking out independently as a single and career-oriented 'New Indian Woman' as showcasing 'the many little hypocrisies and pettiness of the women.'[143] As much as Lau's analysis engages with the complexities of the protagonists' agencies in the texts, an

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[139] Sunder Rajan, 'The Heroine's Progress', p. 224.

[140] Sunder Rajan, 'The Heroine's Progress', p. 225.

[141] Sunder Rajan, 'The Heroine's Progress', p. 230.

[142] Lisa Lau, 'Literary Representations of the "New Indian Woman": The Single, Working, Urban, Middle Class Indian Woman Seeking Personal Autonomy', *Journal of South Asian Development*, 5.2 (2010), 271–92 (p. 272).

[143] Lau, 'Literary Representations of the "New Indian Woman": The Single, Working, Urban, Middle Class Indian Woman Seeking Personal Autonomy', p. 282.

exploration of this narrowly defined 'New Indian Woman' seems to inevitably lead to her being positioned as contradictory to 'family' women who are defined by the very thing she struggles against – their roles within the family and the circumscription of their agency within this structure, which they use to establish control over other (usually) younger women in the family.

A mother figure's agency, in the context of this circumscription that is accompanied also by the cultural value placed upon mothering, presents interesting possibilities. As mentioned earlier, the birth of a son affords the mother increased agency since she moves from the 'silent shadowy existence' of a wife to a mother who has performed her function in reproducing the family name, and is now tasked with his rearing.[144] As a daughter's mother as well, increased agency is presented in the task of 'perpetuat[ing] the [patriarchal] system victimising those who do not conform.'[145] Simultaneously, however, as Veena Poonacha notes, 'motherhood is used as justification for [women's] exclusion from all avenues of power, position and creativity in the public domain' and results thus in a lack of agency.[146]

These complications in the agentic possibilities for mothers can be seen as contributing in large measure to the fraught relationship that feminism, both globally and in India, has with motherhood. As Patrice DiQuinzio states, '[i]t is impossible for feminist theory to avoid the issue of motherhood, and it is impossible for feminist theory to resolve it.'[147] Two different strands of discourse exist within feminism, one of which reads reproduction and motherhood as a patriarchal institution that is oppressive to women, while the other emphasises motherhood as 'proof of women's contribution to human history and of

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[144] Meena Shirwadkar, *Image of Woman in the Indo-Anglian Novel* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1979), p. 79.

[145] Geetanjali Singh Chanda, 'Mapping Motherhood: The Fiction of Anita Desai', *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, 4.2 (2002), 73–83 (p. 74).

[146] Poonacha, p. ix. A clear difference is visible here in the mother's agency within the private sphere, as opposed to its lack in the public sphere. This will be addressed further in Chapter 5.

[147] qtd. in Podnieks and O'Reilly, p. 5.

their capacity for heroism'[148], as well future possibilities of female experiences of 'child-rearing and nurturing as an alternative to the prevailing masculine values of domination and control.'[149] The figure of the mother thus 'haunts feminist theory and scholarship' with her contradictions.[150] It is this constant, complex and contradictory haunting of mother figures that is present, and hopefully retrievable, in the analysis of the texts that is to follow in this thesis.

Methodology

This chapter so far has delineated the various contexts that play a central role in its analysis of the ten novels this thesis will be studying. This section will expand upon the methods of analysis that the thesis will use to extract the representations of female agency within these texts.

The thesis is interested, first and foremost, in establishing a link between the text and its contexts through a focus upon the *shifts* in the representation of mother figures over the three decades from 1980-2010. It will establish this link through focusing upon various analytical layers that meld history and fiction together – the author's own positionality within the various discourses at play in these decades that create perceptible tensions in her oeuvre (principally Hindutva, feminism, and neoliberalism), the manner in which these tensions affect the locations of characters, the reception and interpretation of these characters by audience and critic, as well as an extrapolation of these discoveries to understand the shifts within the Indian feminist discourse itself in response to women's dynamic and complex positionalities. Such a socio-historic feminist approach that relies upon historical and

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[148] Deanna L. Davis, 'Feminist Critics and Literary Mothers: Daughters Reading Elizabeth Gaskell', *Signs*, 17.3 (1992), 507–32 (p. 509).

[149] Poonacha, p. x.

[150] Davis, p. 509.

sociological material, explores the multifarious levels of representation in both real and fictional spaces, and privileges the context of the texts, allows this study to be defined as a cultural materialist analysis which 'approach[es] the relationship between text and context with an urgent attention to the political ramifications of literary interpretation.'[151]

In approaching these novels through this framework, it is necessary to contemplate how the thesis is reading realist fiction through a metaphoric lens when it extrapolates the mother-daughter relationship to signify feminist and nationalist politics. If the realist mode can be defined semiotically as attempting to present a direct relationship between signifier and signified, then these fictions cannot be open to the interpretations that this thesis is interested in achieving for these novels. Without adopting a stance of causation, however, what this thesis wishes to undertake is an ideological reading of manifestly domestic texts in a manner that resembles Edward Said's reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* through the ideological framework of imperialism.[152] Such an analysis requires not only the historical and social context of the texts under study, but also a focus on their use of tropes in their characters, their actions, or more general plot points (many of which are identified in the analysis to follow) that allow us to assign meaning outside of what a realist framework might encompass.

In addition to the context established in this first chapter, analysis will be undertaken in Chapter 2 of the specific historical contexts of Hindutva and neoliberalism between 1980-2010, where women's positions as both agents and victims within these discourses will be established, alongside a focus upon feminist responses to these seismic shifts in Indian society. The contexts established in these two chapters undergird the literary analysis undertaken in the remaining three chapters of the thesis, which focus upon texts from the

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[151] John Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 3.
[152] Edward Said, 'Jane Austen and Empire', in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), pp. 81–97.

1980s, 1990s, and 2000s respectively. In their literary focus, each of these chapters concerns itself with the specific functions afforded to female characters (specifically mother figures), namely villainy, nostalgia and political action. Each chapter thus relies upon a broad theoretical basis of feminist approaches to mother-daughter relationships, while also engaging with the requisite contextual and formal analytical tools relevant to the texts under study in it. Chapter 3 (on the mother's villainous function) is thus informed by psychoanalytic readings of the mother's centrality in childhood development, feminist perspectives on 'bad' mothering, and the female daughter-centric *bildungsroman*. Chapter 4 (on the mother's nostalgic function) is undergirded by theories of social remembering/memory, postcolonial material on the mother's function as upholder of cultural identity, feminist theories of women's self-expression, and the novel's capacity for heteroglossia. Chapter 5 (on political agency) is supported by theories of spatial politics in relation to class hierarchies in the Indian context, the literary traditions of 'domestic, 'national' and 'political' fiction, and the feminist concern with intersectionality and radical protest along with their literary manifestations in the 'protest novel'.

Each chapter will analyse 3-4 novels by the four authors under study, thus establishing not only a broader canon of urban Indian English writing by women, but also noting patterns within each author's oeuvre as the political and economic circumstances affect the authors' representative aims in their fiction. Through these methods, the thesis hopes to closely examine how the representation of female agency fluctuates between its simplistic/complex, public/private, singular/intersectional dimensions over the decades as the Indian feminist attitudes towards agency and resistance themselves evolve. It will do so through an attempt to uncover the various discourses that form the framework within which the agency/resistance of the Indian woman as 'subject' is executed.

The thesis's focus on Othering within feminist discourse (manifested within the mother-daughter relationship) presents a clear dichotomy that is admittedly in danger of reinforcing a sharp divide between those identified as feminist subjects and those who are excluded. However, this Otherness requires identifying only insofar as the aim of the project to challenge such Otherness. The attempt here will be to rupture the dichotomous formulation of femininities through a mode of deconstruction that will take into account the various discourses in which the female subject is interpellated and the manner in which her agency is both limited and encouraged by the discourses she negotiates with. It will attempt to complicate the positions inhabited by different subjects to recognise contradictions, and thus bring closer, the currently oppositional configuration of the 'subject' and 'non-subject' of feminism. This use of deconstruction will help not only in 'the dismantling of hierarchical binary conceptual oppositions', but also to 'expose the blind spots of texts, the unacknowledged assumptions upon which they operate' and '[highlight] the tension between what a text means to say and what it is constrained to mean.'[153]

Similar to this deconstruction of the idea of female subjecthood, this thesis will also endeavour to press against a 'certification of resistances'. If resistance is understood as encompassing both the revolutionary and the quotidian, then it follows that there can be no attempt to evaluate whether or not the female subject 'is' resistant without an accompanying essentialisation that deems her 'always resistant' or 'always passive'. Instead, her complicities as well as her resistances can be explored to determine her affiliations, highlighting once again her contradictions. There is thus no attempt to 'retrieve' a female subject or her resistance in a manner that might promote an essentialist idea of wholeness; instead it will try to 'examine and call into question the very stuff of which civil society is made, to appreciate the strategies of power at work in its most cherished figures and self-

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[153] Barker, p. 47.

images.'[154] The study of the subaltern is then effectively a study of the failures of the dominant and its configurations of civil society. This idea is specifically aligned to the study being undertaken here in that the aim of an exploration of the 'othered' woman in feminist fiction is not the 'retrieval' of such a subject, but a questioning and challenging of the discursive myths that have a stake in the formulation of this subject and its otherness.

In summation, the methodology of this thesis might be abridged into Nita Kumar's two-fold (and intertwining) approach to the study of Indian female subjects, which is to 'focus on the structures within which they exist […] , especially patriarchal, ideological, discursive structures' and to 'look at the hidden subversive ways in which women exercise their agency even while outwardly part of a repressive normative order.'[155] It is with these aims in mind that I now proceed, in the second chapter, to a study of the ways in which women have engaged with Hindu nationalism and neoliberalism in India.

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[154] O'Hanlon, Rosalind, 'Recovering the Subject Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies*, 22 (1988), p. 221. As O'Hanlon notes, an important illusion propagated by 'the modern western state [is] that it has been able to realise and to preserve…a realm of neutral freedom, but that obstacles have arisen in the way of all of its population reaching it.' This illusion has created the impression that 'it is only [the] short-comings [of the dispossessed] – their fecklessness as subalterns, their closeness to nature as women, their helpless addiction to authoritarian traditionalism as ex-colonial societies – which prevent them from being welcomed into its own numbers.' In thus highlighting the empiricist bias implied in the notion of 'retrieval', O'Hanlon reconfigures the orientation of studies of the marginalised.
[155] Nita Kumar, p. 2.

Chapter 2

Hindutva, Neoliberalism and Indian Feminism

In its analysis of the definitions of Indian womanhood, the first chapter has underlined how, since the 1980s, women's agency in India has been the primary subject of historical and sociological feminist study. It has also introduced the various discursive shifts that took place in these decades, which allowed for the reconfiguration of feminist scholarship and emphasised the need to explore ideas of women's passivity and resistance. This second chapter is concerned with two important contextual elements, namely communal violence and neoliberal globalisation, that produced such discursive shifts. These discourses have manifested through specific, often interrelated, events in the country in the decades since the 1980s. The Shah Bano court case[1] and the pro-sati demonstrations[2] in the 1980s, the

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[1] In 1985, the Supreme Court of India ruled in favour of Shah Bano Begum, a woman who had been divorced by her husband and who had filed a petition to receive alimony from him to support herself and her children. The decision was controversial because it highlighted the contradictions between Section 125 of the Criminal Code Procedure, which requires the husband to provide maintenance to a divorced wife in case of her inability to support herself, and the Islamic Law, which requires the man to provide maintenance only during the 90-day *iddat* period after the divorce. In response to the outcry of conservative Muslim organisations which construed the Supreme Court's decision as an attack upon Islam, the ruling Congress Party quickly reacted to the issue by enacting the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 that undermined the Supreme Court's judgement and took away Muslim women's rights to alimony. This controversy is often regarded by feminist scholarship as a turning point in women's relationship with their religious identities.

[2] Sati is a Hindu ritual practice in which, upon the death of her husband, a woman immolates herself upon her his funeral pyre. While the practice was abolished under British rule, it was rekindled in the post-independence period. The issue became controversial when an 18 year old woman Roop Kanwar committed sati in 1987, especially since there was evidence of coercion.
Radha Kumar records an instance of a pro-sati demonstration in 1983 when the Rani Sati Seva Sangh undertook a celebratory procession to commemorate a grant from the Government to build a sati temple in Delhi. Kumar notes Delhi feminists' decision to hold a counter-demonstration, as well the fact that 'this was the first time that they had to confront a group of women in a hostile situation; this was in itself so distressing that it took the heart out of their demonstration.' This instance, and the Roop Kanwar sati incident in 1987, are noted as the first public manifestations of women's specifically Hindu identities.

demolition of the Babri Masjid[3] and the following riots in the 1990s, and the Godhra riots[4] in the 2000s were central to the development of a strong communal discourse that seeped into social, political and economic domains. Communal aggressions were also accompanied by simultaneous shifts in economic agendas, beginning with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's gradual drive towards privatisation in the 1980s, which culminated in the Structural Adjustment Program undertaken in 1991, and the subsequent economic boom experienced in the early 2000s.[5]

These events have shone the spotlight upon the complex locations of women as both victims and agents within religious and secular discourse, and have thus been important in stimulating debate upon previously narrow ideas of women's agency, as well as on the shifts required within feminist theory and praxis that could acknowledge such complexities. In analysing the literature on women's participation in both communalism and neoliberal capitalism, this chapter explores the ways in which these discourses effected deep-rooted change in ideas of agency in India, how this change influenced and shaped Indian feminist theorisation in empirical fields of investigation (such as history or sociology), and how these ideas of women's agency and resistance could lend themselves to literary study, particularly to the analysis of female characters in 'bourgeois feminist fiction'.

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[3] Hindu extremists destroyed the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, India on 6th December 1992, since they believed that the mosque stood upon the birthplace of the Hindu God Ram (it is thus called the *Ramjanmabhoomi*, which means Ram's birthplace). It was alleged that the Mughal emperor Babur destroyed the Ram temple that was originally on site in the 16th century, and built a mosque to symbolise his domination over Hindus. The movement has its origins in pre-independence India, but gained momentum in the 1980s, culminating in the Babri Masjid demolition. This demolition and subsequent attacks on Muslims were considered by the Hindu extremists as a historically valid method of 'revenge' for their apparent subjugation by Muslims.

[4] Inter-communal violence took place in the Indian state of Gujarat from January to March 2002, specifically in the state capital of Ahmedabad. This Hindu-Muslim violence was incited by the death of several Hindu pilgrims when a train compartment caught fire at Godhra station, and the incident was blamed upon the Muslim residents of the area.

[5] Montek Singh Ahluwalia, 'The 1991 Reforms: How Homegrown Were They?'', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51.29 (2016), 39–46. Ahluwalia's essay traces the gradual shifts undertaken by the government over the 1980s that resulted in the reforms of 1991.

Women's Agency and Communalism

The centrality of women to religious discourse in India, like most other aspects of contemporary Indian history, can also be traced back to the era of British colonialism and the nationalist struggle, not least because the discourse of Hindutva itself originates in the early decades of the twentieth century under the mantle of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Savarkar's famous tract, 'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu', published in 1923, defined Hindus as 'a Rashtra [state], a Jati [race][who] own a common Sanskriti [tradition] expressed, preserved chiefly and originally through Sanskrit, the real mother tongue of our race.'[6] Contemporary Hindu communalism inherits its exclusivism from Savarkar's declarations of Hindu racial purity which he embeds within the notion of 'Hindutva' or 'Hinduness'. It also continues his legacy of targeted attacks upon Muslims and Christians as the Other.[7]

However, it is not just the origins of a radical Hindu discourse that makes the colonial era central to a discussion of women's agency in the religious context. It is also important to note, once again, the specifically Hindu ethos of the independence movement, already identified in the first chapter in terms of the Hindu rhetoric used by Mahatma Gandhi and the centrality of the Hindu goddess figure in eliciting women's participation in the nationalist movement. Specifically, scholars have emphasised the difference between Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru's approaches to religion. While Nehru advocated a completely secular, individualised, liberal state based upon the Western tenet of the separation of Church and State, Gandhi emphasised the centrality of religious identity for Indians and therefore

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[6] Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is A Hindu?*, 5th edn (Bombay: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1969) <https://ia800609.us.archive.org/19/items/hindutva-vinayak-damodar-savarkar-pdf/hindutva-vd-savarkar.pdf> [accessed 16 September 2017], p. 99.

[7] Basu et al (1993) have noted how this exclusivist argument is 'eminently extendable' such that 'Communists' or 'advocates of secularism, science and democracy can be tarred with the same brush' (9). This Othering is also central to the Hindutva discourse on femininity and precisely points to the manner in which it attempts to delegitimise feminism through similar Othering as well.

encouraged its expression and celebration in public.[8] Both approaches, however, have been problematic in trying to encompass the diverse components of the Indian populace, and both have failed in their own measure.

On the one hand, Gandhi's tenet of the public expression of religion led to 'a preponderance of Hindu imagery in much nationalist propaganda.'[9] An example of this was the use of Ganpati *utsavs* (celebrations), introduced in Maharashtra by the nationalist B.G. Tilak as a means to unite the Indian people as a community which will subsequently fight against colonial rule.[10] This was, however, an evidently exclusive form of community that included only those who celebrated this festival – Hindus. On the other hand, Nehru's rigidly secular understanding of polity and resistance to colonial rule has been understood as central to the formation of radical Hindu factions. The lack of public religious expression is seen as having created a vacuum in which 'the Hindu Right quickly seized [the] opportunity, filling a cultural void with resonant appeals to nationalistic emotion and to exclusivist ideas of the polity.'[11]

This aporia in the definitions of secularism in India has been central to the debate for feminists as well. The Nehruvian notion of secularism is seen as the inheritance of the liberal intelligentsia in the country – including, of course, feminists – and as one of the primary causes of its alienation from the regular Indian citizen, since it 'do[es] not empathize with

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[8] Christopher Jaffrelot, 'Introduction: The Invention of an Ethnic Nationalism', in *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*, ed. by Christopher Jaffrelot (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 3–5.

[9] Tapan Basu and others, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, ed. by Neeladri Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993), p. 4.

[10] *Ibid*. Ganpati is the Hindu elephant God, whose birth is celebrated as an 11-day-long public event, primarily in the Indian state of Maharashtra. Tilak's promotion of the event has often been understood as a means to circumvent the British colonial law banning public assembly of more than 20 Indians. The sectarian slant embedded in this move is emphasised in the fact that the celebration was seen as 'equalising' opportunities for Hindus and Muslims to congregate, since the latter had been exempted from the public assembly rule for the purpose of Friday mosque prayers (Courtright, 1985).

[11] Wendy Doniger and Martha Nussbaum, 'Introduction', in *Pluralism and Democracy in India: Debating the Hindu Right*, ed. by Wendy Doniger and Martha Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 31.

the everyday life of the common Indian to whom religion gives meaning'.[12] On the other hand, the use of Hindu imagery to help reconcile the gap between the urban, middle-class feminist movement and the 'everyday Indian woman' has also borne criticism because of its capacity to alienate non-Hindu women. This difficulty in determining its approach towards religion forms an important element in the larger debate of representativeness within feminism which has already been touched upon in the first chapter, and will be further addressed later in this chapter.

The relevance of a specifically gendered religious identity in the colonial era can also be traced back to Savarkar, who advocated the use of women, and specifically the idea of 'women's honour', as a weapon against the Other – the Muslim. He 'forcefully argued that Hindu men should rape Muslim women as retribution for the rape and abduction of Hindu women by Muslim invaders.'[13] This sentiment was further strengthened during the Partition, which saw such notions of women's honour and rape used as political weapons by both Hindus and Muslims across the newly formed border.[14] The rhetoric has since percolated into the contemporary Hindutva discourse on violence, to the extent that female members of the Hindu Right (here, a female leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad[15]) echo it too: 'Hindus must make sure that they are feared by others. We have to prove our mettle. If they rape 10–

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[12] Gurcharan Das, 'The Dilemma of a Liberal Hindu', in *Pluralism and Democracy in India: Debating the Hindu Right*, ed. by Wendy Doniger and Martha Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 459.

[13] Amrita Basu, 'Engendering Communal Violence: Men as Victims, Women as Agents', in *Invented Identities: The Interplay of Gender, Religion and Politics in India*, ed. by Julia Leslie and Mary McGee, SOAS Studies on South Asia: Understandings and Perspectives (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 270. Savarkar refers here to historical instances of Muslim conquerors arriving from the North West, such as the Khaljis in the 13th Century or the Mughals in the 16th Century.

[14] Urvashi Butalia, 'Muslims and Hindus, Men and Women: Communal Stereotypes and the Partition of India', in *Women and Right-Wing Movements: Indian Experiences* (London ; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), pp. 58–81.

[15] The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) is a Hindu right-wing organisation founded by M.S. Golwalkar, S.S. Apte and Swami Chinmayanand in 1964. It is part of the Sangh Parivar (Family of Organisations) of Hindu Nationalist groups led by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Patriotic Organisation). It was heavily involved in the Ramjanmabhoomi dispute and Babri Masjid demolition. The organisation has a number of women's divisions, as well as a separate women's wing, the Durga Vahini (Durga's Carrier), which was founded in 1991 under the leadership of Sadhvi Rithambara.

15 of our women we must also rape a few to show them that we are no less.'[16] The dangers of such misogynist communal rhetoric have been emphasised by Urvashi Butalia, who focuses upon its origins precisely because it is not limited to those involved in the Hindu Right and therefore cannot be dismissed as radical sensationalism. This rhetoric is embedded within the collective Indian historical imagination of colonialism and the Partition, which legitimises the Hindutva appeal for the othering of and violence against Muslim women, thus making it exceedingly dangerous.[17]

What becomes clear in this manner of defining women's honour is the specifically gendered nature of communal discourse.[18] It is within this history of the Partition that '[t]he communal stereotypes of sexually rapacious Muslim men, decent though often weak Hindu men and pure, vulnerable Hindu women solidifie[s] into collective myth.'[19] Additionally, the Muslim woman becomes 'the medium through which the [Muslim] community consolidates itself; she plays a key role in the reproduction of the community,' and is therefore targeted in order to destabilise the community as a whole.[20] Women are thus central to communal violence; they are 'constituted in and through communal identity, and conversely, community is constituted in and through women's gender identity.'[21] However, even in this central

[16] S Anitha and others, 'Interview with Women', in *Women and Right-Wing Movements: Indian Experiences*, ed. by Urvashi Butalia and Tanika Sarkar (London ; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), p. 332.

[17] Butalia.

[18] This gendering of communal violence has been the focus of many feminist studies, most notably the work of Amrita Basu (1998; 2000). Basu has emphasised 'the attribution of masculine or feminine traits to entire communities, or more precisely, to men from these communities' (2000, p. 65). Communal violence is thus seen as engendering the hypermasculinisation of the aggressor and the feminisation of the victim. Additionally, those men from the aggressing community (Hindus, in this case) who refuse to participate in the violence are also shamed in specifically gendered ways. For example, they are sent bangles to signify 'womanly cowardice' (Sundar, 2002).

[19] Elen Turner, 'Empowering Women? Feminist Responses to Hindutva', *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, 2012 <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue28/turner.htm> [accessed 20 October 2018], para 18.

[20] Bina Srinivasan and others, 'Women in a Fractured Society: The Gujarat Pogrom and After', in *Women and Violence in Gujarat: Special Plenary Session* (presented at the Xth National Conference of the Indian Association for Women's Studies, Bhubaneshwar: Indian Association for Women's Studies, 2002), p. 4.

[21] Ratna Kapur and Brenda Cossman, 'Communalising Gender, Engendering Community', in *Women and Right-Wing Movements: Indian Experiences* (London ; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), p. 83. The essentialisation that is attendant in such a configuration of women's identities has also been commented upon by

position, women once again become reduced to the function of representation, and the communal battle is carried out upon women's 'passive' bodies. A most galling affirmation of this function for women has been the use of false media reporting about violence against women to incite communal violence. The Godhra riots of 2002 were triggered to a large extent by fabricated reports in regional Gujarati newspapers of Hindu women's rape and dismemberment during the train fire incident. The impact of these articles is evidenced by the fact that:

> [in] Naroda Patiya, the worst-affected area in Ahmedabad, the mobs who attacked Muslim shops and homes, and brutalized Muslim women and children, were brandishing in their hands not only swords and stones, but copies of the [newspaper] *Sandesh* with the Godhra attack as the banner headlines, shouting '*khoon ka badla khoon*' (blood for blood).[22]

Thus, for women, communal riots signify commodification within a conflict based upon religiously defined masculinities. Additionally, they also signify a retrenchment of patriarchal values within both the aggressing and victimised communities. For Muslim men, their masculinity, which is threatened by their inability to protect Muslim women from being 'dishonoured', is restored through re-establishing control over the bodies and sexualities of 'their' women. For Hindu men, the Hindu woman's imagined vulnerability to the Muslim man is a crucial justification for the violence itself, and therefore, it becomes imperative to control her body and sexuality as the repository of pure Hindu lineage, to the detriment and complete erasure of her own choice. This is evident, for example, in the work of VHP leader Babu Bajrangi who 'rescued' (kidnapped and beat up) Hindu women married to non-Hindus,

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scholars, who focus upon the necessarily homogenous construction of the 'Hindu woman', who is defined in opposition to the Muslim woman (Kumkum Roy, 1995)

[22] Barkha Dutt and others, '"Nothing New?": Women as Victims in Gujarat', in *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*, ed. by Siddharth Varadarajan (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2002), pp. 230-231. This was not the first incident of such false reporting. In fact, such reports were also found to have instigated communal riots in Bhopal, Surat and Ahmedabad in 1993. ('Report of the Women's Delegation' in Sarkar and Butalia, 1995, p. 307)

and forced them to abort if they were pregnant from such a union.[23] Communal discourse thus completely undermines women's agency, and presents them as passive vassals of the community's honour and traditions.

However, this emphasis upon women's passivity within the discourse does not necessarily translate to women's complete silence or inaction during communal violence. In keeping with Michael Adas' elucidation of the permeability of discourses and the ways in which they present possibilities for negotiation and agency even to those who are subordinated, women have participated in, and interacted with communal discourses in many ways. The most evident and radical of these is women's open resistance to communal violence.

The very fact of the existence of the reports and analyses I have so far relied on to understand the impact of communal violence on women signals towards the essential role that women have played in fighting against it, particularly women from the urban middle class belonging to various feminist organisations (and thus privileged enough to escape the discursive forces that dictate women's passivity or collusion). Feminist organisations have been recorded as being concerned about communalism, and Hindutva in particular, since the late 1980s, with various women's conferences focusing upon the discussion of religion, politics and activism. [24] However, with the eruption of communal violence in 1990s,

> [w]omen activists jumped into action, mobilizing marches, demonstrations and street corner meetings against Hindu extremists. They allied with other rights organizations protesting the brutal attacks on the Muslims. Almost overnight, the focus of the feminist movement took a dramatic turn[25]

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[23] Lakshmi Murthy and Rajashri Dasgupta, *Our Pictures, Our Words: A Visual Journey Through the Women's Movement* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2011), p. 138.

[24] Gabriele Dietrich, 'Women and Religious Identities in India after Ayodhya', in *Against All Odds: Essays on Women, Religion and Development from India and Pakistan*, ed. by Kamla Bhasin, Ritu Menon, and Nighat Said Khan (Delhi; Colombo; Philippines: Kali for Women; South Asian Women's Forum; Isis International, 1996), pp. 35–49.

[25] Lakshmi Murthy and Rajashri Dasgupta, *Our Pictures, Our Words: A Visual Journey Through the Women's Movement* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2011), p. 151. In these sections on women's agency during the communal riots, whether in supporting it or resisting it, data has been collated to encompass the various instances of agential

Various forms of women's agency have been central to the work of feminist organisations against communalism. During the riots, such agency can be located within the aforementioned forms of protest against the violence as well as in the rehabilitation work carried out by these organisations in relief camps to alleviate the community's suffering. In terms of their gendered role, women's organisations were especially central in aiding victims of sexual violence. The various fact-finding report groups acted as systems of verification (in their role as truth-recording agencies) for rape victims. This visibilising of rape was particularly crucial in the face of its systemic neglect by the police and governments in power. The reports challenged the patriarchal, communal and political biases afflicting the power systems, and provided a 'voice' to women who were silenced by them.[26] They also used their own political influence to directly question officials at the helm, to hold them accountable, as well as to demand punishment for the perpetrators of communal violence.

Feminist groups thus engaged in organised forms of agency sanctioned by their legitimacy as formal collectives, and were therefore able to openly resist the communal discourse in ways that emphasised their position/ location 'outside' the discourse. Women on the ground (that is, those belonging to these warring communities), however, were embedded within the discourse and were thus expected to acquiesce to the hegemonic narrative that dictated the Otherness of women from the 'enemy' community. It is here that the notion of the discourse's permeability becomes central, since it is evident from reports that important

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behaviour, beginning in 1985 (in Ahmedabad) to the riots in 2002 (in various parts of Gujarat). While this leads to a certain vagueness in the dates and locations of the different events, the data allows for such generalisation precisely because of the repetitive, patterned nature of the findings of various scholars, which have allowed for the identification of various themes in the ways in which men and women engage with communal discourse.

[26] Murthy and Dasgupta (2011) have noted, for example, that 'there were at least 20 fact-finding reports by women's groups and other rights organizations' in the aftermath of the Godhra riots in 2002. (p. 153)
The question remains, however, of the efficacy of such reports in alleviating the issues that women faced, when communal riots, and the targeting of women in such riots, has continued over the decades since such reporting began. One probable cause of this inefficacy could be the fact that access to them is limited to distinctly upper/ upper-middle class, educated members of the intelligentsia. It becomes necessary also to recognise the locations of women from these organisations, and to underline the distinction between *'darstellen'* and *'vertreten'* made by Gayatri Spivak (1993) in understanding the relationship between the subaltern and her privileged benefactors.

pockets of resistance to communalism, encompassing both Hindu and Muslim women, developed on the ground. Such resistance can be understood as resulting from the violent rupturing of normative gender roles caused by the riots, thus creating a vacuum within which women's agency, even in its unconventional forms, became acceptable.

Various reports have underlined Muslim women's brave involvement in resisting the violence. They undertook protective roles for their families, determining where they should hide or how they should escape, or even facing violence themselves in order to protect their menfolk and children. They were often responsible for their families' survival, because it was (ironically) deemed safer for women to move in public than men, or because curfew was often lifted only for women. They collectivised to protest or to demand support from figures of authority (such as the police or cabinet ministers).[27] They were also important in the processes of rehabilitation, with scholars underlining the centrality of Muslim women and girls in the community's rebuilding efforts within relief camps.[28]

Many instances have also been recorded of Hindu women protecting members of the minority during the riots. Some organised peace processions, and prevented Hindu mobs from engaging in violence; others protected Muslims by hiding them in their homes or helping them get away; still others coalesced with Muslim women in their area to form peace committees and showed solidarity with the minority community.[29] According to Amrita Basu, this resistance to the dictates of Hindutva was possible primarily because it is 'easier

[27] AIDWA and others, p. 300; Flavia Agnes, 'Redefining the Agenda of the Women's Movement within a Secular Framework', in *Women and Right-Wing Movements: Indian Experiences* (London ; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), p. 150; Dutt and others, p. 244.

[28] Sharmila Rege, Vaishali Diwakar, and Anagha Tambe, 'Gujarat Carnage: Outlining the Gendered Character of Communal Stereotypes, Strategies and Violence', in *Lessons from Gujarat* (Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 2003), p. 109.

[29] AIDWA and others, pp. 305, 309, 315-16, 324-25; Basu, pp. 273, 278; Dutt and others, p. 244; 'Narratives from the Killing Fields', p. 170.

for Hindu women than Hindu men to oppose such violence since women are not expected to display their strength in the same ways as men.'[30]

Such examples of solidarity between Hindu and Muslim women during communal violence can be seen as validating a previously popular and naïve notion of women's unity beyond religious, class or caste affiliations. In order to prevent such romanticising of women's subjectivities, it becomes important to emphasise their retrenchment within patriarchal hegemony once the violence subsides. This is evident in an example from Surat where Hindu women helped Muslim women 'escape in saris, with *bindis* and *mangalsutras*,' but when the Muslim women made an attempt to return the clothes and thank them, they were asked to stay away. The report further records that the women's delegation itself attempted to speak to the helpful Hindu women but '[c]lear hints not to talk were given by an elderly gentleman and the women clammed up. Clearly they were too scared of the consequences to even admit to an act of courage which saved members of 'the other side'.'[31]

It is such reticence, and women's evident recession into their predefined roles within both communal and patriarchal discourses after the violence that leads the delegation to emphasise that 'it would be suicidal for the women's movement to ignore the increasing influence of communal thinking among women'.[32] This warning is further strengthened by the large amounts of evidence, gathered by delegations, of Hindu women 'supporting the violent actions of Hindu men and often even of becoming complicit in it themselves.'[33] It is this third unfortunate dimension of women's agency during communal violence which has been the central focus of the literature on the gender dynamics of these events, and has led to a revolutionised understanding of Indian women's agency as encompassing not only

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[30] Basu, p. 278.
[31] Anitha and others, p. 305.
[32] Anitha and others, p. 302.
[33] *Ibid.*

women's 'liberation' from patriarchal hegemony in a specifically 'feminist' context, but also their active involvement in the promotion of apparently patriarchal value systems.

Within the communal context, such agency has been evident amongst women who actively engaged in, or encouraged and supported, or simply condoned the violence against the Muslim community as a whole, and Muslim women in particular. Such participation by women can be traced to the riots in the early 1990s when 'the powerful images of Sadhvi Rithambara and Uma Bharati began to goad Hindu men into violence in the riots.'[34] Female ascetics such as Rithambara, Bharati and Vijayaraje Scindia have been an important and, through their cassette tape recordings, widespread source of hateful rhetoric against Muslims, and therefore considered directly responsible for the demolition of the Babri Masjid.[35] Their powerful agential capacities and ability to negotiate within the very discourses of Hindu masculinity and femininity that they have helped to ossify, have proved to be a source of fascination for feminist scholarship on female agency.

In her essay, 'Feminism Inverted: The Gendered Imagery and Real Women of Hindu Nationalism', Amrita Basu studies the agencies of these individual women who have transcended the bounds of traditional femininity as prescribed by the very discourse that they affirm and strengthen through their public images.[36] Basu finds that none of these women inhabit specifically feminine traits (for example, being nurturing, passive or peace-loving). Instead, they seem to use the space within Hindutva discourse to further the possibilities of their own freedom from the traditional demands of femininity, whether that be marriage,

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[34] Rege, Diwakar, and Tambe, p. 97.

[35] Rithambara, Bharati and Scindia are Hindu ascetics well known for their public speaking skills. Rithambara's speeches were popularly cited as a major source of incitement during the Babri Masjid dispute. While these women's journeys into Hindutva politics differ, they have all been prominent members of organisations within the Sangh Parivar, primarily the BJP, VHP and RSS.

[36] Amrita Basu, 'Feminism Inverted: The Gendered Imagery and Real Women of Hindu Nationalism', in *Women and Right-Wing Movements: Indian Experiences* (London ; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995). Bacchetta (1996) has similarly commented upon the ways in which the *pracharika* figure in the Samiti transgresses all bounds of hegemonic femininity and rebels against the expected roles of wifehood and motherhood.

motherhood, or a dependence upon men. They inhabit a space of freedom, mobility and strong visibility through their thoroughly 'unfeminine', 'loud, angry, coarse public speeches,' during which they not only interact with men but threaten their very masculinity.[37] In one of her cassettes, Rithambara thus exhorts her male audience to

> [d]iscard the cloak of cowardice and effeminacy and learn to sing the song of bravery and heroism! You watched the looting of the Somnath temple and stood silent; what did you receive in return for your silence? They took your virility, purity and your greatness to be cowardice and effeminacy.[38]

Basu underlines the conditions that allow such transgressions by these women, namely their chastity (which desexualises them and thus legitimises their entry into the public sphere), and their Othering of Muslims, which allows for a cathartic release of frustrations with their experiences within Hindu patriarchy, without threatening or undermining the hegemonic structure itself. It thus becomes evident that this agency is circumscribed within the hegemonic bounds of Hindutva patriarchy. In fact, it can be argued that 'the dazzling presence of the spectacular triad […] is meant to blind us to the crucial absence of women at the heart of effective action.'[39] Furthermore, their gender might excuse, and possibly dilute, the powerful sectarian rhetoric espoused in their speeches, allowing easily for them to be construed as 'women's irrationality in the public domain'[40] when juxtaposed against the rationality embodied in the male leaders of the movement, best exemplified in the RSS leader 'L.K. Advani's beatific smile' and relative laconism.[41]

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[37] *Ibid*, p. 164.

[38] Basu, 'Engendering Communal Violence: Men as Victims, Women as Agents', p. 276.

[39] Tanika Sarkar, 'Heroic Women, Mother Goddesses: Family and Organisation in Hindutva Politics', in *Women in Right Wing Movements: Indian Experiences* (London ; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), p. 211.

[40] Basu, 'Feminism Inverted: The Gendered Imagery and Real Women of Hindu Nationalism', p. 173.

[41] Neeladri Bhattacharya, 'Introduction', in *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993), p. vii. L.K. Advani is a politician and RSS leader who catalysed the Ayodhya dispute through his Ram Rath Yatra (chariot procession). Beginning in September 1990, the month-long rally travelled through six states, garnering support for its demolition agenda, before ending at the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The procession was noted to have left a trail of communal conflict in its wake in various parts of the country, for which Advani was arrested. The procession continued without its leader to Ayodhya, where a mob managed to cross security barriers to climb the mosque and erect a saffron flag (representing Hindutva) on top. Efforts were also made by the mob to demolish the mosque, a goal which they were to accomplish three years later.

The display of women's centrality to Hindutva discourse in this manner also underlines the concern within the discourse with its image-making, since these women's uber-public roles can then be used to 'signal the greater liberation of Hindu than of Muslim women.'[42] Basu has distinguished between the terms 'fundamentalism' and 'communalism', recognising that while the former projects itself as conservative and retreats into tradition in order to counteract the influence of 'Western modernity', the latter instead prefers to paint itself as modern by pitting itself against the more conservative faction (in this case, the Indian Muslim community), thus projecting itself as *more* progressive and 'Westernised'.[43] Women are central to this project of modernity in their representational function, in that their agency allows Hindutva to argue for the progressiveness of Hindu men who 'allow' their women agency and freedom. It is within this 'condition of possibility' that women like Rithambara and Bharati, as well as other ordinary women functioning within the paradigm of Hindutva, are able to transgress their femininity and access the public sphere.[44]

As a collectivity, women have been known to participate in the violence on the ground during communal riots in various forms, typically through membership in organisations such as the Rashtrasevika Samiti (known colloquially as the Samiti), the Durga Vahini, and other women's groups attached to the right-wing fraternity known as the Sangh *Parivar* (family).[45] Women have, however, typically functioned in a supporting role to the violent Hindu men, primarily in the logistics required to conduct large-scale violence.

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[42] Basu, 'Feminism Inverted: The Gendered Imagery and Real Women of Hindu Nationalism', p. 176.

[43] Amrita Basu, 'Appropriating Gender', in *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*, ed. by Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 171. Zoya Hasan (1998) has noted how, during the controversy surrounding the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code to replace religiously defined Personal Laws, 'Muslim women were represented as "unfortunate slaves" of the "evils of Islam"…For the protagonists of Hindutva, their mission was to rescue Muslim women from the clutches of these oppressive religious laws.' (78-79)

[44] Pnina Werbner, qtd. in Kalyani Devaki Menon, *Everyday Nationalism: Women of the Hindu Right in India* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 7.

[45] The Rashtrasevika Samiti is the women's wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the first Hindutva organisation which was formed in 1923 and is considered the parent body of all organisations that stand for the Hindutva cause. The Samiti was set up in 1936 by Lakshmibai Kelkar.

Reports of the Godhra riot have noted that women from the VHP conducted household surveys a month prior to the riots, collecting data about Muslim homes and shops which was then used to direct attacks during the riots.[46] They have been central to the preparation before the violence, as evidenced by the rituals followed by women during the Babri Masjid demolition: 'As the men boarded the trains, the women would garland them , place *tilaks* (vermilion marks) on their foreheads, and give them freshly prepared hot food […] women were instructed to prepare up to fifty thousand food packets each day.'[47] They also protected rioting men from law enforcement by 'hold[ing] up traffic […], demonstrat[ing] outside police stations [or sleeping] on roads to prevent army trucks from entering the area to rescue Muslim hostages or put out fires.'[48] The protection they offer the men is itself gendered in that it takes advantage of their femininity as a form of immunity. When women 'encircle the men to prevent the police from wielding their *lathis* (bamboo sticks),' they rely upon the policeman's inability to inflict violence upon women because of cultural sanctions.[49]

The gendered nature of their involvement also enters the politics of their incitement of men, specifically showcasing their interpellation within hegemonic notions of femininity and masculinity. They have thus

> used multiple tactics in coaxing, cajoling and chiding their men during communal flare-ups […] Castigating their masculinity through language and symbols such as offering bangles and petticoats, asking men to wear bindis […], describing them as eunuchs or as impotent […] was a threat to expose the fragility of masculine identities[50]

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[46] Dutt and others, 95-96.

[47] Amrita Basu, 'Hindu Women's Activism in India and the Questions It Raises', ed. by Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 179.

[48] Flavia Agnes, 'Redefining the Agenda of the Women's Movement within a Secular Framework', in *Women and Right-Wing Movements: Indian Experiences* (London ; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), p. 150; Basu, 'Engendering Communal Violence', p. 167.

[49] Amrita Basu, 'Hindu Women's Activism in India and the Questions It Raises', p. 179.

[50] Atreyee Sen, *Shiv Sena Women: Violence and Communalism in a Bombay Slum* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2007), p. 49.

While these supporting acts by themselves undoubtedly implicate Hindutva women in the direct violence carried out by men, feminist scholarship on women's participation in Hindutva has been most concerned with (and most shocked by) evidence of the women's own undertaking of forms of violence that are traditionally defined as masculine, during the riots. This involvement has ranged from looting shops and homes owned by Muslims, to leading 'a procession through a Muslim neighbourhood with *trishuls* (tridents) in hand, shout[ing] bigoted, inflammatory slogans', to 'stripping women before they were sexually assaulted by mobs [and] dousing women, children and others with petrol before they were burnt to death'.[51] Such violent action has been traced by scholars to their training with women's organisations of the Sangh Parivar, which has focused upon readying women 'for militant and violent action' with a specific political goal in mind.[52] The VHP, for example, 'launched special training camps for young Hindu women to act as "protectors of the faith", including training in the use of swords and/ other weapons.'[53]

These masculinist displays of violence are once again reconfigured within this Samiti discourse in ways that can justify women's violent agency. For example, their actions are identified with female Hindu deities such as the warrior goddesses Durga and Kali who are revered for their fierce femininity, or the figure of Bharat Mata (Mother India) who also functioned as a nationalist symbol during the Independence struggle. Another important medium of justifying martial arts training is, of course, the threat of the Muslim man. However, such training would also evidently benefit a woman in fighting against Hindu patriarchy. In her study of a member of the Samiti highly trained in martial arts, Paola Bacchetta highlights the cognitive dissonance of the woman who, while justifying her

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[51] Bina Srinivasan and others, p. 7.

[52] Sarkar, 'Woman, Community, and Nation: A Historical Trajectory for Hindu Identity Politics', p. 102.

[53] Murthy and Dasgupta, p. 151.

training through this threat of the Muslim Other, admits to only having faced sexual

harassment by Hindu men.[54]

Such configurations of Hindutva ideals to benefit the women's own goals of

liberation from patriarchy have been emphasised by scholarship, through noting that

women's agency within communalism cannot be considered a mere replication of male

nationalist, right-wing ideologies, or as women's being imbued in a false consciousness, but

must be instead recognised as an ideology of female activism that has 'zones of convergence,

of antagonistic divergence, complementary difference and antagonistic difference' with its

male counterpart.[55] In some forms, women's participation in communalism helps promote

their own goals of achieving independence and developing a sense of citizenship. Thus, the

demolition of the Babri Masjid meant a

> double victory: the Babri Mosque was destroyed and their men had conceded them a
> place in the campaign. Their violent commitments had given them a slightly improved
> bargaining power at home, and earned them the respect of their RSS minded fathers,
> husbands, and sons.[56]

Sarkar goes on to note how this 'victory' led to a certain confidence in the women so that

they were able to begin questioning patriarchal expectations of early marriage, or criticizing

gender discrimination and sexual harassment in public spaces.

In other ways, these women completely transgress or challenge male leadership

within the Sangh Parivar. For example, in dressing as a boy and physically participating in

the Babri Masjid demolition, Uma Bharati transcended the boundaries placed upon women's

agency by male leaders, who did not allow women to climb up on to the Masjid or take part

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[54] Paola Bacchetta, '"All Our Goddesses Are Armed": Religion, Resistance and Revenge in the Life of a Militant Hindu Nationalist Woman', in *Against All Odds: Essays on Women, Religion and Development from India and Pakistan*, ed. by Kamla Bhasin, Ritu Menon, and Nighat Said Khan (New Delhi; Colombo; Philippines: Kali for Women; South Asian Women's Forum; Isis International, 1996), p. 153.

[55] Paola Bacchetta, *Gender in the Hindu Nation: RSS Women as Ideologues* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004), p. 3.

[56] Tanika Sarkar, 'Violent and Violated Women in Hindu Extremist Politics', in *Pluralism and Democracy in India: Debating the Hindu Right*, ed. by Wendy Doniger and Martha Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 608.

in its physical destruction.[57] Such a challenge is also mounted from a sense of sisterhood amongst the women, as evident in the female BJP members' confrontation of a male member who had insulted Uma Bharati, or through the protests of these women's groups at being sidelined within the larger organisation, and their demands for broader representation.[58]

Hindutva women's agencies have thus posed a complex challenge for feminist scholarship. On the one hand, scholars have repeatedly underlined the fact that, while these groups embody some forms of empowering women that coincide with feminist notions of women's progress in society, their efforts cannot be defined as feminist since they depend upon an agenda of hatred, violence and the suffering of other women in order to carry out their agencies. Their agency has thus forced the movement to re-evaluate previous assumptions within feminism that women's movement into, and involvement with, the public sphere is inherently feminist and progressive. It also ruptured the assumption of a universalist definition of womanhood which was based upon 'feminist ideas of sisterhood, women's pacifism, false consciousness and the secular nature of Indian feminism'.[59]

Such a distinction between feminist and Hindutva agendas became especially necessary in the face of right-wing women's co-opting of both feminist language and feminist agendas to their own benefit. The former was highlighted when, during the Roop Kanwar controversy, notions of agency, choice and freedom were used to justify the practice of *sati*. The latter was underlined in the 1980s when 'feminists found to their discomfort that the Hindu right was seemingly campaigning along with them on several issues', including their fight for a Uniform Civil Code that would grant equal rights within marriage and family to all

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[57] Basu, 'Feminism Inverted: The Gendered Imagery and Real Women of Hindu Nationalism', p. 169.
[58] Agnes, p. 147.
[59] Turner, para 25.

Indian women, or their protests against the objectification of women in beauty pageants, pornography, films and advertising.[60]

On the other hand, these women's participation in the public sphere, their ability to negotiate within patriarchal discourse to achieve some form of agency, and their fluid movement between 'traditional' and 'modern', and 'private' and public', has led feminist scholarship to the important conclusion that '[q]uestions regarding the participation of women in communal violence can no longer be limited to discussions of women being either victims or agents.' Instead, there is a move 'towards understanding what kind of agents women can be despite their subordination.'[61] This firstly requires a recognition of the rigidly formulated discourses of masculinity and femininity that hitherto undergirded feminist thought, and the ways in which women's engagement in such violence interrupts these myths. Tanika Sarkar notes how, in its preoccupation with women's victimisation, feminist scholarship was previously only able to understand a violent or victimising woman 'as a dupe of masculine violence, so imbued with male messages that she has become a clone of her teachers: she is, therefore, desexed, defeminized. In being violent, she acts like a man.'[62] Such an understanding also reimbues a sense of victimisation, in that it identifies women as passive receivers of a false consciousness deliberately formulated by patriarchal discourse.

Instead of such a dichotomised understanding of women's participation in violence, feminist scholarship moves towards a more complex understanding of agency itself, which recognises that women are active participants with patriarchal structures who engage in

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[60] Murthy and Dasgupta, p. 154. It was the Uniform Civil Code debate that brought a realisation amongst feminists of the inherently (and unconsciously) Hindu ethos of Indian feminism, which was produced in response to criticisms of its 'alien and Western' origins. In the context of the UCC, the efforts to revolutionise Muslim and Christian personal laws were accompanied by a neglect of the regressive, patriarchal elements in the Hindu Code Bill. This 'contributed to the fiction popularised by the Hindu fundamentalists that the Hindu code is the perfect family code which ought to be extended to other religious denominations in order to 'liberate' women' (Agnes, p. 146).

[61] Rege, Diwakar, and Tambe, p. 99.

[62] Sarkar, 'Violent and Violated Women in Hindu Extremist Politics', p. 590.

intricate interactions and negotiations with various discourses. It is these negotiations that

Kumkum Sangari underlines in her seminal essay 'Consent, Agency and the Rhetorics of

Incitement', where she notes that patriarchal control over women cannot be established

through a complete suppression of women's agency or a demand for their complete

submission to it. Instead, it becomes important for patriarchal discourses to formulate a

system in which 'consensual, contractual elements combine agential power with subjection

for women and produce a mixture of consent and resentment.'[63] Women's caste, class, age

and position within the family structure become essential components in determining the

'patriarchal dividends' or rewards they receive.[64] It is because of such complexly defined

locations, then, that women simultaneously critique certain elements of patriarchy, while also

reinforcing the larger hegemonic structure. This is exemplified by Roger and Patricia

Jeffery's ethnographic work with women in Bijnor, where they find that

> Women often bemoan having too many children and their difficulties in obtaining
> contraceptives, yet they do not critique local preferences for sons, [and] [c]ritical
> commentaries on marital violence are often tempered by assertions that men should
> not tolerate willful and defiant wives.[65]

What is highlighted in these contradictions is women's focus upon their personal subjective

experiences of patriarchy, as well as their airing of grievances with patriarchal constrictions

placed upon them. However, they also refuse to radically defy the hegemonic patriarchal

discourse, since it forms the very social and kinship structures within which they are

embedded, and from which they often gain dividends. It is the allure of these safer, quotidian

forms of women's agency that scholars have identified as being the most significant element

of the attraction for women towards the Hindu right.

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[63] Kumkum Sangari, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28.18 (1993), 869.

[64] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 79.

[65] Patricia Jeffery and Roger Jeffery, 'Gender, Community and the Local State in Bijnor, India' (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 137.

For women from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds, various factors impede the possibility of enacting feminist realities, including 'opposition from their menfolk', lack of time, or illiteracy.[66] Even when women do approach feminist organisations working on the ground, these groups 'are viewed as a temporary forum for airing grievances and not as providing a permanent means for altering behaviour.'[67] Thus, while providing support for women, feminism is unable to percolate into the women's daily lives, and to engender a sense of unity amongst them. The main cause for this hesitation, it has been argued, is the radical nature of feminist protest. Feminist organisations

> ask women to protest against injustice, to question what is given as common sense, to think and act for themselves. This often leads to social isolation, emotional deprivation, loss of anchorage and mooring. Radical organizations cannot replace the lost world. New convictions cannot combat the weight of inherited norms.[68]

Additionally, the feminist movement itself has displayed 'the marked tendency to focus on national-level legal rights,' resulting in the neglect of the quotidian and personal nature of the gendered experience that Jeffery and Jeffery highlighted in the previous quotation.[69] In contrast, Hindutva organisations have been able to insert themselves into the women's lives, and therefore, to mobilise them during moments of 'crisis', precisely because of their focus upon the 'quiet, subterranean, informal, and everyday' aspects of women's lives, accessed through 'personal networks of local exchanges, relationships, and influence'.[70]

It becomes possible for Hindutva to access these personal spaces through their use of religion, an already private and collectivised arena, as the primary source of women's

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[66] Patricia Jeffery, 'Agency, Activism, and Agendas', in *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 221–44.

[67] Sikata Banerjee, 'Hindu Nationalism and the Construction of Woman: The Shiv Sena Organises Women in Bombay', in *Women and Right-Wing Movements: Indian Experiences* (London ; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), p. 227.

[68] Sarkar, 'Woman, Community, and Nation: A Historical Trajectory for Hindu Identity Politics', p. 101.

[69] Farida Shaheed, 'The Other Side of the Discourse: Women's Experiences of Identity, Religion and Activism in Pakistan' (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 143–66.

[70] Sarkar, 'Violent and Violated Women in Hindu Extremist Politics', pp. 603-604.

identification with each other. Such organising on the basis of religion allows women's personal relationship with religion to be politicised, and for her agency to be legitimised through an 'erasure of boundaries between home and the world, private and public spaces, religion and politics' such that she recognises 'the public Hindu cause as a deeply felt and experienced private wrong.'[71]

Scholarship on Hindutva has emphasised this use of religion in its recruitment of women, especially in contrast to feminism's 'complete neglect of religion reflected in its stance of all religion being patriarchal.'[72] Feminist activism at the grassroots had hitherto assumed that 'focusing on material conditions will make toiling people see the 'real' issues,' and thus refused to engage with rigid identity markers such as religion.[73] However, the arrival of Hindutva women has forced both feminist theorists and activists to recognise religion as an important and pervasive denominator in women's lives. V Geetha and T V Jayanthi have noted that 'religion not only sustains and enriches the imaginative, inner life of women but also structures their [material] experience in very specific ways' through the rituals, fasts, festivals, cuisine, and other cultural markers that 'serve to inscribe into women's lives and onto their bodies marks of religiosity'.[74] These religious experiences also help to develop a gendered sense of collectivity with other women through the shared practice of such rituals and traditions. Religion thus provides women with opportunities 'to affirm both individual self-worth and membership in the community.'[75] It is this powerful sense of selfhood and community that Hindutva capitalises on in using religion as its common denominator.

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[71] Geetha and Jayanthi, p. 246-247.

[72] Rege, Diwakar, and Tambe, p. 110.

[73] Bina Srinivasan and others.

[74] V Geetha and T V Jayanthi, 'Women, Hindutva and the Politics of Caste in Tamil Nadu', in *Women and Right Wing Movements: Indian Experiences* (London ; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), p. 245.

[75] Basu, 'Appropriating Gender', p. 9. This does not, however, undermine the rigidly patriarchal nature of both Hindu and Hindutva religious discourses. Once again, it becomes necessary to underline the permeability of the dominant discourse and the ways in which it 'allows' the subordinate figure some scope for agency and selfhood such that any threat of fundamental transformation is sublimated. (Adas, p, 301)

Moreover, Hindutva's focus on religion restricts the possible diversity within the group, such that most of its members belong to single class and caste formations, thus creating a strong united front based on 'shared norms and values' in which 'their mobilization […] is exceptionally powerful.'[76] It is such unity that the feminist movement's activist efforts have often been found to lack, as Sikata Banerjee notes in her study of Shiv Sena's mobilisation of women in the slums of Mumbai.[77] Banerjee ascribes this to the fact that the Shiv Sena's 'mid-rung leaders live and work in the slums enabling daily interaction with women,' while the feminist movement's middle-class origins restrict the possibilities of developing similar 'multi-faceted mutual relations of trust with these women.'[78]

The reliance upon religion, and the celebration of some of its especially patriarchal qualities, is also central to the consent of the women's male guardians to their participation in such groups. The focus upon the notion of '*parivar*' or 'family' in the Hindutva movement's image-making allows for the organisation to be seen as 'an extension of the family,' which allows for the belief that 'women can assume activist roles without violating the norms of Hindu womanhood or ceasing to be dutiful wives and mothers.'[79] The position of women within the family and society thus remains secure, even as groups' social activities provide the benefit of 'spicing up their lives with the excitement of a limited but important public identity.'[80]

Feminists have conceded that the work of organisations like the Samiti or the Shiv Sena amongst women has provided genuine opportunities for women's empowerment through social welfare programs. Some programs focus upon building a sense of community,

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[76] Banerjee, p. 225; Sarkar, 'Woman, Community and Nation', 101.

[77] The Shiv Sena, founded in 1966, is a regional right-wing political party based in the state of Maharashtra that supports the Sangh Parivar's national-scale Hindutva ideology. It has been largely responsible for the local manifestations of national communal disturbances, specifically in the cities of Mumbai and Pune. Its activism is primarily based in the urban slums of these cities.

[78] Banerjee, p. 225.

[79] Dietrich, p. 42; Basu, 'Feminism Inverted', p. 179.

[80] Sarkar, 'Heroic Women, Mother Goddesses: Family and Organisation in Hindutva Politics', p. 185.

such as lectures on Indian history and politics, Sanskrit classes, hymn and prayer sessions, public speaking courses, yoga classes or art shows, which help sate 'a very real hunger for serious, yet easily comprehensible, intellectual discussion among women with lives otherwise largely bereft of such mental food.'[81] Intellectual stimulation is further complemented by physical strengthening through the aforementioned training in various martial arts. Such training helps develop 'self-confidence among their middle-class women who generally come from conservative families in small towns and who have just entered the public domains of education and jobs.'[82] Other programs by Hindutva organisations are concerned with women's social and economic empowerment through the establishment of 'income-generating and job-training projects in urban slums, involvement in housing struggles among the poor, running shelters for homeless women […] and disseminating information on hygiene and health to the urban and rural poor.' These projects evidently coincide with the work that feminist groups carry out in the grassroots, thus furthering the Hindutva agenda of co-opting feminist imperatives through positioning their women's groups as the '"indigenous", "authentic" alternative to Indian feminist and developmental organisations which, it maintains, come from "outside".'[83]

It thus becomes evident that the Sangh Parivar's women's groups exert great influence upon the political, economic and cultural milieu of the country, and are able to take advantage of the gaps that have remained within the possibilities for feminist agency and activism. In understanding how these groups have attained such immense power, it has been especially important to underline the manner in which they seek to align themselves with the prerogatives of the feminist movement, while simultaneously distancing themselves from its

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[81] Sarkar, 'Heroic Women, Mother Goddesses: Family and Organisation in Hindutva Politics', p. 236; Bacchetta, 'All Our Goddesses are Armed', p. 135-136; Basu and others, p. 43.
[82] Sarkar, 'Violent and Violated Women in Hindu Extremist Politics', p. 605.
[83] Bacchetta, '"All Our Goddesses Are Armed": Religion, Resistance and Revenge in the Life of a Militant Hindu Nationalist Woman', p. 135-136.

culturally 'alien' connotations. In order to better understand this dichotomisation of women's identities and loyalties since the 1980s, it becomes necessary to examine the advent of neoliberal and globalising agendas in India, which reintroduced the tradition versus modernity debate on Indian women's agency that dominated the colonial discourse on women's agency.

Women's Agency and Neoliberalism

As an economic policy, neoliberalism was introduced to India through the New Economic Policy of 1991 which implemented free market policies and privatisation, thus radically transforming a previously closed economy that had depended upon near total import substitution and strict licensing rules since the Nehruvian era.[84] This new policy engendered shifts that affected not only employment patterns and corporate culture, but also fundamentally altered the individual's relationship with society. A primary factor in this shift was the introduction of a new form of consumerism that depended upon the proliferation of choice, and it is this inducement of choice that is the central focus of scholarship that examines women's agency in the context of neoliberalism.

As Tanika Sarkar has noted, liberalisation of the economy led to 'a specifically feminine consumerism' that concentrated upon 'women's fashion items and household gadgets that are meant for women's use.'[85] Many of these new products were aimed at simplifying housework, thus making redundant women's traditional homemaking function within society. Additionally, the growth of an advertising culture to promote these items also introduced 'innumerable spectacles of Western life styles' that accompanied the market's inundation with imported goods. A new discourse of Indian womanhood was generated

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[84] Ahluwalia.
[85] Sarkar, 'Violent and Violated Women in Hindu Extremist Politics', p. 103.

through these ads, embodied by actresses or models who 'ha[d] light hair and skin, [wore] Western or Westernized clothing, and convey[ed] a sexy demeanor.'[86]

The neoliberal culture of consumption was thus able to address the Indian woman as an agential individual, who is encouraged to spend money on herself and is interpellated into an ideology of American individualism. Such individualism was further amplified by women's newfound access to '[a] public identity generated by jobs, education, and a new self-image,' which threatened 'the traditional [Indian] domestic values of the self-effacing woman who lives not for herself but for her family.'[87] The values of womanhood encouraged by this neoliberal context can thus be seen as closely related to those emphasised by the feminist movement, and thus were perceived to be just as threatening to conventional patriarchal ideals.

However, the development of a public identity not only emphasises a woman's individuality, but also her specific location within a class- and caste-segregated society, which defines her movement within the public sphere. This became particularly evident during the anti-Mandal agitations in 1990[88], which garnered much support from working, upper-caste, middle-class women and thus emphasised that women's 'newfound public status in education and jobs stitched them more closely with the caste/ class interests of their men, in ways that older housewives would not have been.'[89] Women's identities and agencies were thus manifested in much more complex ways, and emphasised the widening gap between women from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Further, the illusion of increased agency for (all) women as represented in neoliberal advertisement culture was ruptured in

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[86] Basu, 'Hindu Women's Activism in India and the Questions It Raises', p. 181.

[87] Sarkar, 'Violent and Violated Women in Hindu Extremist Politics', p. 103

[88] The anti-Mandal protests were organised by anti-reservationists in opposition to the Mandal Commission's suggestion of a 27% reservation quota for people belonging to the OBC (Other Backward Class) in government jobs and public universities. Protests took the form of road blocking, strikes and student protests.

[89] Sarkar, 'Violent and Violated Women in Hindu Extremist Politics', p. 610.

recognising that, while some women were able to access the privileges of consumerism and independence, 'the mass of lower-class women [would] find employment shrinking in the formal sector, job securities vanishing, and social benefit and trade union possibilities becoming chimerical.'[90] For some women, then, neoliberal capitalism functions as an exploitative industry characterised by low wages, harassment and gender stereotypes, and implemented by an essentially patriarchal neoliberal state. The recognition of this gap has been particularly important for feminist activists, because the feminist movement draws most of its members from the former privileged class which benefits from neoliberal economics. This adds another (economic) dimension to the previously discussed barriers in the feminist movement's incapacity to percolate into the grassroots.

Not only does neoliberalism thus thwart possibilities for (all) women's agency, scholarship has also emphasised how this new form of economy has led instead to further entrenchment of patriarchal values within the domestic space. In undertaking employment and 'competing in a sense with men in the labour market', women are obligated to be 'constantly apologetic about appropriating the breadwinning role of men.'[91] The uncertainty resulting from fundamental changes in society because of globalisation also necessitates, once again, 'a growing need for cultural specificity, and the assertion of a cultural identity.'[92] This echoes the origins of the public versus private and tradition versus modernity debates of the colonial era, so that men are seen to 'become citizens and claim democratic rights in these new spaces which are essentially alienating' while they continue to 'look back and actively depend for their sense of identity and rootedness on the old community which has now

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[90] Sarkar, 'Woman, Community, and Nation: A Historical Trajectory for Hindu Identity Politics', p. 104.

[91] Vasanth Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran, 'The Frying Pan or the Fire?: Endangered Identities, Gendered Institutions and Women's Survival', in *Women and Right-Wing Movements: Indian Experiences* (London ; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), p. 131.

[92] *Ibid.*

shrunk to family and a religio-cultural fringe.'[93] Thus, once again, the onus of expressing this 'Indian' identity is placed upon women as 'the bearers of tradition.'[94] It becomes evident then that, like Hindutva, neoliberalism offers a superficial but alluring agential possibility for women, while ultimately undermining concrete avenues for women's independence.

The uncertainty resulting from economic shifts, and the identity crisis generated by the accompanying cultural shifts, help contextualise the meteoric rise of Hindu nationalism in these same decades of the advent of neoliberalism. Some scholars have noted that the search for a stable identity predictably led to people's reliance upon supposedly 'ancient' forms of community-formation, namely religion and race. The Hindutva groups' work at the grassroots provided an easy source of both empowerment and community, 'of refuge, stability, tranquillity and peace where people's life will be protected,' at a time when economic and social frustrations were enhanced.[95] Scholars have pointed to the appeasement politics of the governments in these decades, which, in their desire to assuage the panic caused by the gradual shift towards a neoliberal economy and to showcase a respect for 'culture' and 'religion', legitimised the growth of identity politics through their stances on issues such as Shah Bano's plea for alimony or Roop Kanwar's *sati*.[96] On an individual basis, the eruption of communal violence itself has also been understood as directly resulting from this socioeconomic adjustment, since it allowed for the frustrations to be blamed upon the Other, that is upon 'Muslims, whom they see as a "pampered lot."'[97] Additionally, the introduction of neoliberal employment patterns was central in obliterating previous class- and trade-based community formations that superseded religious identities, so that the erstwhile

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[93] *Ibid*, p. 124.

[94] *Ibid*, p. 131.

[95] Dietrich, p. 48.

[96] Zoya Hasan, 'Gender Politics, Legal Reform, and the Muslim Community in India', in *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 71–72.

[97] Hasan, p. 73.

tactic of 'defus[ing tensions] by appealing to working class solidarity, which transcended the boundaries of primordial loyalties' was no longer possible.[98]

   While these factors elucidate the newfound prominence of Hindutva ideas amongst the working classes, its growing political and social prominence indicates a wider acceptance, including amongst upper caste, middle class, urban populations, which has also been traced to the introduction of neoliberal economics. In her book *The God Market*, Meera Nanda illuminates this link through focusing upon 'India's growing visibility in the global economy' as the impetus through which 'Hindu religiosity is getting fused with feelings of national pride and dreams of becoming a superpower,' primarily because this 'Hinduness' is placed at the centre of a newly formulated understanding of 'Indian culture' which has developed under the pressure of an international spectatorship.[99] This conflation of Indian-ness and Hinduness might be innocently built upon 'old customs and traditions that [Hindu] people are fond of, and familiar with' and therefore trace a cultural ancestry to.[100] However, this Hindu-ised 'Indian' identity evidently bolsters pre-existing arguments made within Hindutva ideology, tracing back to Savarkar, that celebrate India as an essentially Hindu nation. It becomes evident then that the introduction of neoliberal globalisation allows certain previously marginalised Hindutva ideals to escape the fringes of political and ideological thought, and to become rooted much more deeply in popular culture so that a publicly Hindu identity based on 'Hindu triumphalism' itself becomes hegemonic.

   Nanda particularly traces this public declaration of, and pride in, a Hindu/Indian identity and religiosity to the newly formed middle class, 'made up of white-collar workers in the new Internet-enabled global service industry (IT, business office processing [BOP]),

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[98] Jan Bremen, qtd. in Siddharth Varadarajan, 'Chronicle of a Tragedy Foretold', in *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*, ed. by Siddharth Varadarajan (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2002), pp. 14-15.
[99] Meera Nanda, *The God Market: How Globalization Is Making India More Hindu* (Noida: Random House India, 2009), p. 4.
[100] Nanda.

banking, accounting, insurance, hotels, tourism, etc.) [which] is much admired for putting

India on the global map as an emerging world power.'[101] It is this class which is charged with

representing an essential 'Indian-ness' on a global scale, and is thus most invested in the

newly formed Hindu/Indian identity. Additionally, it is also this class which engages most

deeply in the modernised, consumerist and ritualistic form of Hinduism enabled by 'newly

minted English-speaking and computer-savvy priests, astrologers, vastu shastris, and yoga

teachers who service the middle classes' insatiable appetite for religious ritual.'[102] These

factors illuminate the reasons for Hindutva's ideology's movement, not only from the fringes

to the centre of an Indian cultural identity, but also from its working class origins into the

middle classes (which are also incidentally the intended audience of the texts under study

here). Additionally, Hindutva itself has been understood as capitalising upon this popularity

of its ideas amongst the middle classes by 'adapting its hitherto excessively shrill and

narrowly petty bourgeois ideology to the most ambitious and more settled nature, proclivities

and imperatives of the ruling class.'[103] Radhika Desai reads this 'mellowing' or

'gentrification' of Hindutva an attempt not only to widen its appeal, but also to promote its

political impetus of gaining state power, which was fulfilled in 'the formation of a Hindu

nationalist government in May 1998 at the crest of hindutva's recent electoral surge,' and we

can perhaps add, once again in 2014.[104]

      Through such an examination of Hindutva's relationship with mainstream politics and

neoliberal economics, it thus becomes possible to recognise the malleability of its discourse,

now founded upon a new and popular Hindu cultural identity, which allows it to present a

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[101] Nanda, p. 66.

[102] *Ibid*, p. 3.

[103] Radhika Desai, 'Culturalism and Contemporary Right: Indian Bourgeoisie and Political Hindutva',
Economic and Political Weekly, 34.12 (1999), 695. Desai specifically examines the example of Ashis Nandy as
an important 'intellectual' figure charged with 'chang[ing] and updat[ing]Hindutva' in ways that would make it
more palatable to educated electoral constituents (695).

[104] Radhika Desai.

modern self-image and become palatable to the English-speaking, bourgeois classes. This contemporary shift in Hindutva ideals is significant for women, and is once again manifested through their representational function, as they come to embody 'the contradictory qualities that [Hindutva] seeks to project: – a rootedness in the past and a commitment to a (economically) liberalised modern India.'[105] Thus, Hindutva women are 'free to wear western clothes and use foreign cosmetics, to visit beauty parlors[and] look attractive to their husbands.' They, however, cannot manifest the accompanying 'individual freedoms in love, self-expression, and life choices'.[106] Instead, their agency is channelled through Hindutva-approved modes, which are underlined by Swati Dyahadroy in her study of the women of the Dnyana Prabodhini. Dyahadroy notes how the group uses the notion of *seva* (service) to provide middle-class, upper-caste Hindu women with a sense of purpose and empowerment in a way that also emphasises the neoliberal quality of an individual's utility to society – '[S]uch a woman citizen of the Hindu nation combats the cultural invasion of globalisation through collectivisation, modernisation and "universalisation" of brahminical rites and rituals.'[107]

Women's agency is thus once more highlighted in its particularly intricate form, which negotiates simultaneously with the intertwining discourses of nationalism, neoliberalism, and religion. And through this observation, we also arrive once more at the singularly forceful consensus with feminist scholarship on Hindutva and neoliberalism which underlines that while a woman exercising agency within these discourses 'may have experienced profound transformation in the conditions of her existence, yet the changes would not enlarge the notion of women's rights,' and therefore do not contribute to the larger

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[105] Aravind Rajagopal, 'The Emergence of a National-Popular Television Aesthetics: Syrveying in the 1990s Through Advertisements', in *Pluralism and Democracy in India: Debating the Hindu Right*, ed. by Wendy Doniger and Martha Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 275–328.

[106] Sarkar, 'Violent and Violated Women in Hindu Extremist Politics', p. 611.

[107] Swati Dyahadroy, 'Exploring Gender, Hindutva and Seva', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 64.17 (2009), 72.

objective of women's independence from patriarchal hegemony.[108] The concluding remark of feminist scholarship on Indian women's agency thus encompasses a recognition of its complexities, as well as its incompleteness.

It is this complexity and incompleteness of women's agency that will become the focus of the forthcoming literary analysis of bourgeois feminist fiction in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this thesis. The close analysis of the shifting and contorting conceptions of female agency in the period from the 1980s to the 2000s that this heavily contextual chapter has highlighted serves our literary purposes in two distinct ways. Firstly, it helps identify the underlying presence of these religious, political, and economic discourses within the texts and allows for a study of the characters' interactions with them. This particular study analyses such discursive presences through a focus upon the *difference* of various female characters' negotiations with them. For example, how do Shashi Deshpande's texts represent daughter characters' relationship with religion or neoliberalism and how does this differ from the maternal characters' associations with the same discourses?

The maternal characters' negotiations are particularly highlighted in this thesis for their affinity with the style of agency displayed by the Hindutva women (and also necessitated by neoliberalism), in that their agency often remains circumscribed within hegemonic patriarchal structures while still providing reprieve from complete patriarchal subjugation. More than the daughter figure, then, it is the mother who is able to encompass a manifestation of agency beyond a victim/agent binary that underlines 'what kind of agents women can be despite their subordination.' The literary analysis spotlights these mothers' utilisation of such complex agency through a focus on their 'villainous' resistance to patriarchal codes of mothering (Chp 3), their employment of religious discourse to negotiate a position of power within the patriarchal family structure much like Rithambara, Scindia and

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[108] Sarkar, 'Women, Community and Nation', p. 95.

Bharati undertook within the Hindutva 'family' (Chp 3), their use of storytelling techniques to cement their familial/cultural centrality while retaining the power to reshape identity and history through writing, omission and editing (Chp 4), and finally, their expression of understated yet distinctive political stances against intercommunal violence that are powerful even if they remain circumscribed within the private sphere (Chp 5).

The second and equally important function played by the political and economic contexts studied in this chapter is their necessity in contextualising the writing and publication of the novels under study. These events and discourses help determine the location from which bourgeois feminist fiction is written, as well as the contexts within which it is being read. The authors of these texts are also heavily interpellated in the contradictory discourses of religion and neoliberalism highlighted in this chapter, since they write within a newly formed 'feminist' literary tradition; they write from a specifically Hindu, urban, middle class location; and their English-language texts circulate as commercial commodities within the newly energised neoliberal economy.

Knowledge of the radical shifts within feminist understandings of agency at this time thus helps scrutinise the canon's claim to the theme of 'women's oppression' or 'suffering' while it is produced within decidedly Hindu, upper-caste, middle-class and educated milieus that would, in the larger context of Indian society, be considered privileged. It aids in questioning whether these texts' reception outside of India (which itself is undergirded by the privileges of writing in the English language) simply as 'feminist' or 'women's' fiction undermines the complexities and inequalities which are central to conversations about Indian women at the time. Awareness of rising Hindutva sentiment at the time helps interrogate whether the texts' decidedly Hindu ethos, which is invariably conflated with an 'Indian' ethos in the context of its international consumption, emboldens Hindutva imperatives.

The examination in this chapter of the discursive contexts of Hindutva and neoliberalism in the period from 1980 to 2010 thus allows the thesis's literary study of novels by Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Githa Hariharan, and Manju Kapur in the following chapters to plunge into the depths and complexities of female agential representation, and to focus in particular upon its manifestations in 'private' novels that are interested primarily in the familial canvas inhabited by daughters, wives, mothers, mothers-in-law, and aunts.

Chapter 3

Evil Mothers, Surrogate Mothers: (Not) Mothering As Agency

'And what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive.'

– Luce Irigaray[1]

Introduction

The previous two chapters of this thesis have been concerned with the way in which ideas of agency and resistance have developed in India, particularly within feminist theory, in relation to important cataclysmic events that have taken place in the decades between 1980 and 2010. They have delineated how women's agency is complicated by intersectional affiliations and have explored the responses within Indian feminism to the shifts in women's identifications. The following chapters focus upon how such concepts of agency bear upon 'bourgeois feminist fiction', as defined by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, published during these same three decades.[2]

Such a study of Indian women's writing in English in the context of Hindutva and neoliberalism is attempted here in order to articulate if and how this particular canon that is often read as 'too private' does in fact interact with the seismic shifts in the public discourses of religion, nationalism, economics, and neoliberalism through its representations of women. Investigating this relationship between fiction and history, particularly in the case of women's writing, helps uncover gendered ideas of representation (for example, which author/character is allowed to speak about/for the nation, and who is limited to 'domestic'

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[1] Luce Irigaray and Helen Vivienne Wenzel, 'And One Doesn't Stir Without the Other', *Signs*, 7.1 (1981), 60–67 (p. 67).

[2] Sunder Rajan, 'The Heroine's Progress', p. 222.

commentary?). This thesis's focus on agency also of course makes the texts' representation of agency the most central concern of analysis; it aims to question thus whether the ideas of complex agency and everyday resistance elucidated upon in the previous two chapters play a role in these novels. As noted at the end of the previous chapter, the thesis is particularly interested in the manifestation of such complex agency in the texts' maternal characters, primarily because their continued embedment within the patriarchal family structure necessitates their negotiation with multiple, complex, and often contradicting discourses. These negotiations show some resemblance to those undertaken by Indian women between the discursive locations of religion, nationalism, patriarchy, feminism and neoliberalism through the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s). The thesis is thus able to ask, could the portrayals of agency/resistance in these novels prove useful in understanding how ideas of female agency and solidarity changed over these three decades? In the literary analysis chapters to follow, the socio-historic analysis conducted in the above chapters will be brought to bear (both as context and as analytical tool) upon the novels under study in this thesis.

These chapters of literary analysis will be concerned with the mother's representative function within her daughter's *bildungsroman* (this chapter is concerned with her 'villainous' function, the next chapter will read into the mother's nostalgic function and the final chapter will contemplate if/how she is brought to interact with directly with the political/public domain). Alongside the connection made between these maternal representations and the development of feminist ideas of agency in these decades, since each chapter focuses upon one decade, we are also able to question the particular prevalence of a certain maternal function during a particular decade. For example, is there a reason for the unsparing villainy of mother characters in the 1980s? What is happening in the context of these texts' publication that suggests an antagonistic relationship between mothers and daughters? Ultimately, the aim of the literary analysis undertaken in this thesis is to reorient the feminist

focus placed solely upon rebellious daughters. As Elleke Boehmer has acknowledged, 'in feminist rewritings, […] the subjectivity of mothers (including the much symbolised national mother) is to a large degree displaced in order to foreground the subjectivity of daughters.'[3] The study thus presents an attempt to prioritise the mother's subjectivity and to glean from such a shift a new understanding of agential representation within 'bourgeois' feminist fiction.

This chapter utilises five texts (to varying degrees) to investigate the functions assigned to maternal characters in the 1980s and their manifestations of complex agency, namely Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) and *Roots and Shadows* (1983), Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) and *Fasting Feasting* (1999), and Githa Hariharan's *Thousand Faces of the Night* (1992). The first part of this chapter is concerned with a specifically negative form of female agency that features in bourgeois feminist texts through the representation of 'villainous' mother figures who are identified by their 'bad' mothering of the daughter-protagonist. The second part looks at the idea of group/surrogate mothering in the Indian context, which replaces failed biological mothering in the daughter-protagonist's life. The third part considers these peripheral mother characters' specific relationship with religious agency in these texts.

In all three contexts, the chapter is concerned with how mothering (or a refusal to mother correctly) functions as a form of agency for female characters who remain within the patriarchal framework and do not attempt to effect a break from it through what we would consider more conventional forms of resistance. Such a study of these mother figures' negotiations with hegemonic frameworks contributes to the thesis's broader argument that a focus upon peripheral female characters helps extract more complex ideas of women's

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[3] Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 119–20.

agency in texts that are often caught up in debates on whether they effectively represent women's resistance, particularly through their protagonists' actions. It also helps identify a broader concern within feminism of the possibilities for women's agency within such traditional frameworks, which have been expanded upon in the second chapter, particularly in relation to women's engagement with Hindutva.

A focus on mother characters in these texts is warranted, as noted in the first chapter, by the *bildungsroman* nature of these texts, which invest in a psychoanalytic understanding of the mother-child relationship, where the adult protagonist's issues are understood to be rooted in her childhood, and particularly in her relationship with the mother who has been 'inscribe[d] a central place […] within psychoanalytic theory,' by both traditional psychoanalysts like Donald Winnicott and a large number feminist scholars, including feminist psychoanalysts like Nancy Chodorow.[4] The introductory chapter also emphasised a shift in feminist focus in the post-independence period, from traditional roles allotted to women in the patriarchal family structure (wife and mother) to more formative roles – primarily daughterhood and the working woman – so that women are no longer defined only in relation to men.[5] These female *bildungsroman* novels from the 1980s and 1990s aptly represent such a shift in focus in that their protagonists, even if they are mothers and wives, put a break upon these functions to instead inhabit the role of the daughter and present their development from young girls into women through a memory-based narration. These daughter characters (who are also almost always working women) thus symbolise the new forms of Indian womanhood endorsed within a modernising, neoliberal and feminist context, and are often defined against representatives of older, more traditional forms of Indian womanhood, most frequently their mothers.

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[4] Steph Lawler, *Mothering the Self: Mothers, Daughters, Subjects* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 51.
[5] Radha Kumar, p. 2.

What this chapter intends to focus upon is the texts' representation of such primary and 'traditional' forms of agency available to women within hegemonic patriarchal structures, in which the mother function is a central conduit for women to gain control and power. Women's agency through this mothering function becomes interesting because it is most closely connected to the murky arena of female agency discussed in the previous two chapters where we find that women, rather than overtly resisting or escaping patriarchal formations of wifehood and motherhood, navigate the spaces between emboldening and resisting these structures. What makes this study of mother characters in these texts more interesting is their relegation to the peripheries of a narrative that is ostensibly about the daughter-protagonist, in which the mother features as an intertext and plays a very specific role as foil. In her study of motherly intertexts in daughters' autobiographies, Jo Malin notes that a central element of the conversation between mother and daughter is the abandonment of 'a single authoritative or monologic voice' so that the narrative can feature some dialogism (that is, a rupturing of a narrow singular narrative, with a sense of *dialogue* between mother and daughter characters).[6] This dialogism is not present, however, in the texts under consideration in this chapter. The texts instead showcase what Brenda Daly and Maureen T. Reddy have termed 'daughter-centricity,' in which 'we learn less about what it is like to mother than about what it is like to be mothered, even when the author [here, the character] has had both experiences.'[7]

It is through this daughter-protagonist's narrow perspective, privileged in the text by a monologic first-person narration, that the mother character is identified as 'villainous,' particularly because of her failure (according to the daughter/text) to correctly carry out her mothering function. This 'villainy' becomes interesting in the context of these texts' focus

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[6] Malin, p. 2.

[7] Brenda Daly and Maureen T. Reddy, *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), p. 2.

upon women's (particularly the protagonist's) struggle against patriarchal mandates of women's roles as wife and mother, without extending the freedom to resist such mandates to the mother character. In addressing such patterns of representation, of 'bad' mother and surrogate mother functions, and of daughters attempting to escape the mother's influence, we are discerning certain tropes that are present in all these texts. The texts analysed here exhibit curious similarities in plotlines, particularly in the feature of the prodigal daughter who returns to her natal home, from which she had previously effected a rupture in order to move away from the family (in particular from the mother), and spends time introspecting upon her childhood as well as her more recent (and disappointing) roles as wife, mother and professional, before arriving at a moment of self-knowledge that might spur her into action.[8] These strong similarities in the representation of mother and daughter figures' agencies in the texts under study here means that our analysis is fated to include repetitions and/or to present uneven focus upon the different texts. However, the chapter (and the thesis as a whole) is interested in establishing certain patterns of representation in each of these decades which necessitates the pointing out of similarities in these representations. The analysis here is concerned specifically with establishing and highlighting the texts' use of maternal tropes, in order to identify their function, both within the text as well as in its context which allows for or even necessitates the constant reappearance of these characters, so that we can theorise certain attitudes towards female agency, mothering, and resistance in these texts.

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[8] This trope of the prodigal daughter repeats also in the texts studied in the next chapter, which hints towards a clear theme in bourgeois feminist fiction, and allows us to contemplate its ideas of 'home' and 'identity' for these women, which will be explored in the next chapter.

The texts and their contexts

The three central texts under analysis here, namely Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) and *Roots and Shadows* (1983), and Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) are novels that were published in the early 1980s. Radha Kumar's history of feminist activism notes the decade between 1975 and 1985 as being central to the consolidation of the Indian feminist movement through the proliferation of feminist organisations, the first national women's conferences, and a robust focus on women's issues, particularly through protests against dowry murders and rape in order to catalyse societal as well as policy-level changes.[9] Simultaneously, the country's political and economic conditions saw great upheavals through the Emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi from 1975 to 1978, as well as the shifts in economic policy towards liberalising the Indian economy that began in 1980 and continued until the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Program in 1991.[10] The implications of these seismic shifts within Indian society and culture for women and female agency have already been explored in depth in the second chapter.

The immense rise in popularity of 'bourgeois feminist fiction' coincides with these significant landmarks. The 1980s also signify a period of a sudden amelioration in the status and visibility of Indian Writing in English as a genre within international circuits, upon the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). The genre's international palatability became a dominant feature in favour of increased publication of English-language fiction in India during this decade, allowing it to generate a large number of reviews, awards and award shortlist mentions. Female authors writing in English also shared in this limelight, as exemplified by the authors under study here. Three of Desai's novels

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[9] Radha Kumar, pp. 104–5, 112, 117, 128, 133, 130.
[10] Ahluwalia.

have been shortlisted for the Booker Prize, while Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* received the Commonwealth Prize for the best first novel in 1993.[11]

The genre's reputation indicates that these texts arguably contributed to feminist conversations, as well as being affected, both in content and commerce, by the political and economic changes taking place in India during this decade. It becomes interesting to consider, therefore, why these three texts, presumably written in the late 70s to be published in the early 1980s, feature such strongly antagonistic relationships between mother and daughter figures which are even foregrounded in the texts' marketing blurbs (as noted below for both of Deshpande's novels studied in this chapter). The focus upon the mother/daughter relationship is part of a larger shift in this period from the socially invested novel to the private female *bildungsroman* that began in the 1960s with Desai), which is marked by its movement inward to a psychological study of women's subjecthood. This inward turn can be contextualised by noting a curious (and, yet, not far-fetched) link between women's writing in the novelistic genre and a concurrent rise in popularity of women's magazines.[12] Magazines like *Femina*, *New Woman* and *Women's Era*, aimed particularly at an urban English-speaking female readership, gained much traction during these same decades.[13] The many short stories featured in these glossy ventures (alongside recipes; home remedies; tips for better health, beauty and relationships; and personal columns) also concerned themselves with the 'New Indian' female subjecthood and the navigation of identity and agency within

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[11] Deshpande's work has been noted as being relatively less acclaimed in the international circuit, despite its popularity and acclaim in India which led to her receiving the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990 (Batty, xix). Critics have often pondered upon the reason behind this difference in the reception of Deshpande's oeuvre in comparison to Desai or later writers like Githa Hariharan and Arundhati Roy. Nancy Ellen Batty, *The Ring of Recollection: Transgenerational Haunting in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* (New York: Rodopi, 2010), p. xix.

[12] Shashi Deshpande's early writing career began through publishing short stories in magazines like *Femina*, which attests to the strong connections between this magazine culture and bourgeois feminist fiction. Deshpande also represents the figure of the magazine writer in the protagonist of her third novel *That Long Silence* (1989), thus highlighting the centrality of these magazines within female pop culture of the time.

[13] A robust culture of such magazines in regional Indian languages also enjoyed a similar and simultaneous boost in popularity.

the familial institution, including a focus on women's relationships with their mothers and mothers-in-law. This concern with mother/daughter relationships can thus be read as central to popular culture and conversation through its ubiquity in both these magazines and the novels under study here.

In her analysis of these contemporary women's magazines and their enmeshing of modern and traditional (or even patriarchal and feminist) conceptions of femininity as they attempt to build the figure of the 'New Indian Woman', Leela Fernandes notes how 'Gender […] serves as the socio-symbolic site which attempts to manage the destabilizing contradictions which globalization produces in the Indian nation.'[14] The mother/daughter relationship, replete with animosities, contradictions and identifications, thus becomes one such manifestation of this anxiety surrounding the tradition/modernity clash. As Fernandes goes on to argue, such a representation of conflicting female subjecthoods marks a displacement of 'resistance to the new economic policies of liberalization from the realm of concrete economic policy to a confrontation with a gendered politics of globalization.'[15] The following section's analysis of the frequent recurrence of fraught mother-daughter relationships in these texts, and the formulations of female agency constituted in them, thus understands their relevance as part of a metaphoric conversation about national anxieties surrounding the persistent binary of the 'modern' versus the 'traditional'.

Unmotherly/ 'evil' mothers

The figure of the unmotherly or evil mother is present as a common trope, not only in bourgeois feminist fiction but within popular culture too. In his study of Bollywood villains, Tapan Ghosh underlines this trope's ahistoricity in noting how the mythical figure of

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[14] Leela Fernandes, 'Nationalizing "the Global": Media Images, Cultural Politics and the Middle Class in India', *Media, Culture & Society*, 22.5 (2000), 611–28 (p. 623).
[15] Leela Fernandes, p. 624.

Kaikeyi[16] is used as a motif in the 1964 film *Rajkumar*, and continues to be explicitly associated with the many 'vamps in Bollywood cinema' over the decades, from Lalita Pawar's representation of 'overbearing mothers and wicked mothers-in-law' in the 1950s and 60s to the 'evil-minded widow' played by Manorama in the 1972 film *Seeta aur Geeta*, to Aruna Irani's stepmother character in *Beta* (1992) and Bindu's role disturbing family peace in *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* (1994).[17]

This section of this chapter explores how and why this trope of the evil mother embeds itself so deeply within the bourgeois feminist text and its function in developing the protagonist's subjecthood. It attempts to recoup this 'villainous' figure by underlining the daughter-centricity of the text that implements a particular double standard (that is identified with the daughter-protagonist, though not necessarily endorsed by the text), by enquiring into the possibility of reading such 'villainy' as resistance, and by exploring the daughter/text's discomfort with such resistance that remains within the bounds of a hegemonic patriarchal framework of femininity. This daughterly discomfort, it is argued here, directly echoes the contextual feminist discomfort with women's agency that helps to bolster patriarchal conservative Hindu causes, as seen in Chapter 2. The representation of maternal/daughterly conflict thus replicates the emotional and ideological valences present in the socio-historic context of these texts. We begin such an investigation with a study of two early novels by Shashi Deshpande, published in 1980 and 1983 respectively.

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[16] Kaikeyi is the evil stepmother figure in the Hindu classical epic *Ramayana*. Her role in the epic is to banish the rightful heir and protagonist (Ram) so that her own son (Bharat) might succeed to the throne. The epic's mythical importance in Hindu Indian culture has allowed for Kaikeyi to become a trope representative of the cunning or evil mother figure, as Tapan Ghosh notes in his analysis of Bollywood (Hindi) cinema.

[17] Tapan K. Ghosh, *Bollywood Baddies: Villains, Vamps, and Henchmen in Hindi Cinema* (New Delhi: Sage, 2013), pp. 28, 136, 132, 147. 'Vamp' is the term often used in Bollywood to define a specifically coquettish female character who plays an antagonistic role in the narrative. All the films mentioned by Ghosh are part of mainstream Bollywood with leading actors of the time playing the primary roles, and achieved moderate to extreme success. This central position in the national imaginary suggests the ability of the films' tropes to percolate into popular culture.

The Dark Holds No Terrors

Shashi Deshpande's first published novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), perfectly fits

the mould of the bourgeois feminist text that is concerned with the identity crisis of the

daughter-protagonist and her journey towards apparent self-realisation through an

unrelentingly self-reflexive narration, and features, of course, the tell-tale animosity between

daughter and mother.[18] It tells the story of Sarita, a doctor, daughter, wife and mother whose

life as an urban professional woman is disrupted by two violent incidents – first, the violence

of marital rape inflicted upon her by her husband Manu (her 'love' marriage to whom was,

importantly, against her mother's wishes and led to their permanent estrangement); and

second, the death of her mother which she is informed of through a distant acquaintance.

These incidents propel the character into her role as prodigal daughter, by escaping the

abusive marriage (at least temporarily) to return to her parents' home that is now inhabited by

her father and the haunting memories of her dead brother and now, dead mother.

The text does not feature the above linearity in presenting Sarita's story, instead

allowing the narrative structure to rely upon Sarita's memories. As Nancy Ellen Batty notes,

the novel begins '*in media res*' to then 'radiate out from that point, backward and forward in

time, hinting at a past which is only agonizingly and slowly excavated.'[19] This slow

excavation allows the text to hold a number of secrets, some kept from the reader and others

from the characters, while the central secret is 'the kernel of childhood trauma' centred

around Sarita's brother's accidental drowning in a pond in her presence, her mother's

resulting grief and blaming of the incident on Sarita, and her father's silence in the face of

this treatment of the daughter.[20] This traumatic incident and, in particular, the mother's words

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[18] Shashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1980). All further references to this primary text are from this edition and will be made within the body of the essay. The abbreviation DHNT will be used for this text.

[19] Batty, p. 36.

[20] Batty, p. 55. Whether Sarita is truly responsible for her brother's drowning is an element of mystery in the text. Batty notes that *DHNT* is 'that rarest of mystery novels: one in which the murder suspect does the work of

after the incident, are foregrounded in the summary or blurb of the novel, which begins with

Ai ('mother' in Marathi) asking Sarita, ''Why are you still alive… why didn't you die?'[21] The

statement, betraying the mother's preference for the dead son, drives the narrative as Sarita

repeatedly ruminates over this defining moment in the mother-daughter relationship (pp. 34-

35, 50, 191). Sarita's relationship with her mother thus becomes established as the text's

central conflict, which is rooted within her traumatic childhood experiences so that she

'carries the scar of an early wound through life.'[22]

This focus upon the protagonist's childhood, a given in a *bildungsroman* narrative, is

key in the text's treatment of the mother character, who is underlined as the primary factor

responsible for Sarita's trials. This includes even those ordeals that occur after their

estrangement, because of her formative influence (for example, Sarita questions whether the

trauma of marital rape that she suffers from might have been avoided if her marriage had not

been an act of defiance against her mother: 'if Ai hadn't been so against him, perhaps I would

never have married him' (96)). Ai is thus awarded extreme agency and power over Sarita's

life, in contrast to her father, who is alive and living in the same house, but is relegated to the

peripheries of Sarita's reckoning with her past and present.[23]

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the detective, building a case, step by step, against herself' through her first person narration, with her innocence being proven only in the very last pages (79-80).

[21] Back Cover, Penguin Edition, 1990. The back cover for Deshpande's second novel, *Roots and Shadows*, similarly foregrounds the villainous figure of Akka as 'the rich family tyrant.' As sales pitches for commodities sold for the consumption of audiences both within the country and abroad (Amazon.in uses these summaries in its 'product description',) these quotations and descriptions are made to function as enticements for possible readers of the text, thus establishing the popularity of these (villainous) characters, as well as their importance in the narratives as one of the primary sources of conflict for their protagonists. Amazon, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Kindle Edition (2000) https://www.amazon.in/Dark-Holds-No-Terrors/dp/0140145982/ [accessed 19 June 2020] ; Amazon, *Roots and Shadows eBook: Shashi Deshpande* https://www.amazon.in/Roots-Shadows-Shashi-Deshpande-ebook/dp/B07GPG496W/ [accessed 26 April 2019].

[22] Meenakshi Mukherjee, 'Towards Liberation: Four Recent Novels from India', *Westerly*, 4 (1983), 66–72 (p. 69).

[23] The lack of engagement with father figures is a particular feature of the 'bourgeois feminist text,' where they remain 'shadowy presence[s]' without much agency. The agentic mother figures are thus juxtaposed not only against the feminist daughter but also against the often less conservative father figure. Chodorow's psychoanalytic reading of parent-child relationships presents the father as both 'an escape from the mother's all-embracing power' as well as a frustrating absence in being an 'emotionally distant' parent who 'cannot or will not provide her with the love she wants.' Both of Deshpande's protagonists studied in this chapter present their

In its depiction of this strong maternal influence upon the daughter's subjecthood and life path, the text can be read as subscribing to psychoanalytic concept of 'the good enough mother' who must '[bring] the child from a state of infantile chaos or 'unintegration' to the formation of a coherent ego, with a secure sense of self and other.'[24] Any deviation from such attention to the child's development, interpreted as the mother's failure in her task of mothering, is understood as the cause for disturbance in the child's sense of self. For Sarita, the birth of her younger brother and the resultant neglect from her mother results in 'breaking the baby's continuity of being and creating within it an "unthinkable anxiety".'[25] Even beyond the particular shifts caused in the family by the birth, and later harrowing death, of this brother, there are further points of trauma embedded specifically in the mother-daughter relationship which result from Ai's attempts to mould Sarita into the hegemonic ideals of girlhood and womanhood. Ai thus functions in the text as the conduit of patriarchal norms, 'the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence [are] perforce transmitted.'[26] She is 'a repository of religious and cultural codes', tasked with 'verbalizing the weight of centuries of traditions.'[27] The employment of these codes lead to Sarita's particular conditioning, whether that is preventing her spending time in sunlight so she might

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fathers as this complex object of release as well as alienation. Sunder Rajan, 'The Heroine's Progress', p. 234; Lawler, p. 52.

[24] Steph Lawler, *Mothering the Self: Mothers, Daughters, Subjects* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 48–49; D.W. Winnicott, 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena', in *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock, 1971), pp. 1–18. Here, Lawler uses the term 'good enough mother' which was theorised by psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott in the 1950s to describe maternal adaptation to the infant's needs as the child grows to become independent. The demands made of the mother in this theory are clarified by the following quote from Winnicott: 'success in infant care depends on the fact of devotion, not on cleverness or intellectual enlightenment.' (p. 7) The good enough mother is thus devoted to her mothering role.

[25] Arindam Chatterji, 'Psychoanalytic Regression and the Finding of the True Self in The Dark Holds No Terrors: A Winnicottian Study', in *Writing Difference: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, ed. by Chanchala Naik (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2005), p. 95.

[26] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Paperback (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1986), p. 235.

[27] Amrita Bhalla, *Shashi Deshpande*, Writers and Their Work (Liverpool: Northcote House, 2004), p. 27. This function of the mother as the conduit of traditions is strongly connected to the Hindu and Brahmin milieu that all these narratives function within. Attitudes within the text to Brahminical and religious sentiments are thus represented through the mother-daughter relationship, which once again plays an important role in showcasing the text's stance on questions that are extremely relevant in the public sphere within the microcosm of the family. This religious element will be addressed later in this chapter.

become a suitably fair-skinned bride (45), inducting her into torturous Brahminical rituals of purity surrounding menstruation (62), or opposing her training to be a doctor since the goal is to 'get her married in two years' so that '[the parents'] responsibility is over' (144).[28]

These instances, selected by Deshpande as a clearly apt reflection of the relationship between many Indian mothers and daughters, provide evidence of Ai's investment in propagating 'gender consciousness and difference.'[29] This propagation of patriarchal norms allows Ai to benefit from high 'patriarchal dividends' that give her the opportunity to establish control over her house and family, thus emphasising her agency within the domestic sphere.[30] Here, Ai engages in what Deniz Kandiyoti has theorised as 'bargaining with patriarchy.'[31] Ai's insistence upon her daughter's arranged marriage instead of gaining independence through a medical career is only perplexing until it is contextualised within 'the breakdown of classic patriarchy' in the new market economy.[32] As Kandiyoti notes, '[d]espite the obstacles that classic patriarchy puts in women's way, which may far outweigh any actual economic and emotional security, women often resist the process of transition because they see the old normative order slipping away from them without any empowering alternatives.'[33] Ai thus protests against the shifts that lead to her own submissiveness and dutifulness remaining unrewarded, and the other end of the bargain (namely her right to pass her old age free of worries about economic insecurity caused by college fees and bridal dowry) remaining unfulfilled. From the text/Sarita's perspective, however, Ai's allegiance to and enforcement of such classic patriarchal femininity is defined

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[28] Sarita narrates her mother's imposition of rituals including being banished from the kitchen and prayer room, made to sleep on a straw mat, and served meals from a distance using a different plate and cup, due to beliefs about the female body's 'pollution' during menstruation.

[29] Amrita Bhalla, p. 26.

[30] Connell, p. 79. Connell's theorisation of hegemonic gender functions and 'patriarchal dividends,' and its relevance to our understanding of complex gender relations has been introduced in the first chapter.

[31] Kandiyoti.

[32] Kandiyoti, p. 282.

[33] Kandiyoti, p. 282.

negatively, particularly due to its detrimental effect upon the mother-daughter relationship, or any possible solidarity within it.

In Ai's steadfastly imbuing these gendered biases in Sarita throughout her childhood, and the troubled relationship that exists between the mother and daughter even before the brother's death, it becomes possible to detect a negative identification underlined by Nancy Chodorow's idea that, while mothers see sons as separate from themselves, they see their daughters 'as one with themselves and may project onto their daughters their dislike of themselves (or parts of themselves).'[34] In Sarita's narrative, such dislike is embedded in Ai's view of and comments upon the daughter's adolescent body ('I can remember her eyeing me dispassionately, saying […] You will never be good looking.'; 'there was something unpleasant in the way she looked at me, so I longed to run away, to hide whatever part of me she was staring at' (61-62)). As critic Doreen D'Cruz notes, '[t]he degenerate text the mother reads in the daughter's body comes presumably from her own sense of having been debased and betrayed by her body.' The daughter serves a reminder of her own suppressions, so that 'their similitude in inhabiting the female body is precisely what divides mother and daughter as each sees in the other a legacy of shame and negation.'[35] The text thus suggests an impossibility in the reconciliation of the mother and daughter, who are simultaneously bound together and sequestered by their gendered identities. It underlines the tensions *between* women in patriarchally defined spaces which '[ensure] that in family situations women [are] only able, if at all, to form an uneasy collectivity,' placed as they are in hierarchical positions that allow one to establish greater control and enact more agency than the other (often upon and to the detriment of the latter).[36]

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[34] Lawler, p. 52.

[35] Doreen D'Cruz, 'Feminism in the Postcolonial Context: Shashi Deshpande's Fiction', *S P A N: Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies*, 36 (1993).

[36] Sangari, p. 871.

This representation of alienation between mother and daughter is aided by the text's daughter-centricity, mentioned in the introduction of this chapter as a common feature in these texts. The narrative voice alternates between Sarita's first person, and a free indirect discourse that is still strongly invested in her viewpoint, and the text slips between these two discourses without warning so that the metanarrative and Sarita's own consciousness become indistinguishable. As Daly and Reddy note, daughter-centricity particularly features a woman's imposition of a break upon her own motherhood. Even though Sarita is herself a mother, she positions herself throughout the text as a daughter. This is especially visible at the end of the novel, when the narrative crescendos to a moment of release, finally allowing Sarita and her father to overcome their reticence and talk of the brother and mother's death. In this moment, as she comes to terms with the accusations and traumas connected with these events, Sarita 'was not a wife, not a mother, not a professional woman whom others looked up to. She was the wronged child again, the unloved daughter, the scapegoat' (182).

Deanna Davis, in her essay on mothering in the fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell, argues that a woman's regression in this manner into her daughterly role can be read as a moment of 'acknowledg[ing] women as individual selves with needs that sometimes conflict with the goals of [motherly] nurturance.'[37] It thus allows for the character's disregard of her children, in order to foreground her own needs. While the text seems to allow Sarita this reprieve through its daughter-centricity, her mother is not afforded the same complex individuation in the narration that would allow for her mistakes to be acknowledged as human errors that result from systemic pressures. Thus, even as the text articulates one female consciousness (Sarita's), another remains unexplored: 'the mother [still] remains the observed, this time the object of the female child's understanding', which denies the mother a position as a speaking

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[37] Davis, p. 532.

subject within the text.[38] Through such lack of subjectivity for the mother figure, the text

'engender[s] the reader as feminist subject even though the mother herself retains neither the

gaze nor her femininity.'[39] This engendering of the reader takes place in the implicit

discourse of motherhood that the text propagates. When Sarita says that Ai 'cursed me as no

mother should,' (25) or when another character claims, 'I always imagined no mother could

ever dislike her own child…[b]ut Saru's mother seems to be an exception,' (197) the text

calls upon certain ideals of motherhood which are held to be common knowledge to its

implied readers and suggests that Ai has failed to perform up to its standards.

Ai's function as mother is thus held up to scrutiny by the text and its protagonist. Her

perspective and subjectivity, if at all present, is instead vectored through what Geetha

Ramanathan calls 'transpositioning', defined as speaking through others (children, husbands,

or even folklore).[40] A single remark by Ai's husband of her childhood in her grandfather's

household functions as such 'transpositioning' for Ai's character in this text (194). Apart

from this singular instance, all other quotations attributed to Ai that result in her pervasive,

haunting presence through the text are routed through Sarita's bitter memories of her. While

she speaks from beyond the grave (as in Sarita's noting 'I was an ugly girl […] my mother

told me so' (61)), Ai's death ensures that our access to her as readers is restricted to Sarita's

recollections, which can certainly be assumed to prioritise some memories while excluding

others, thus heavily informing Ai's portrayal. It is through Sarita's restricted perspective that

we find Ai's character constrained to a unidimensional 'bad' or 'evil' mother figure. She is

defined only by her role as Ai/mother, and remains unnamed for almost the entire narrative

(her name, Kamala, first appears on page 144, in the third part of the novel).[41] The text's

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[38] Geetha Ramanathan, 'Sexual Violence/ Textual Violence: Desai's Fire on the Mountain and Shirazi's Javedy Alley', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 39.1 (1993), 17–35 (p. 19).

[39] Ramanathan, p. 19.

[40] Ramanathan, pp. 21–22.

[41] This feature of peripheral mother characters only being named by their social function is persistent through most of the texts studied in this chapter.

daughter-centricity, and its plot beginning with Ai's death, thus stultify any possibility of a

redemption of her complexities because of her inability to respond to Sarita's allegations

against her. In fact, even this death is read by Sarita as a vindictive act – 'She had gone,

leaving the battle unfinished, taking victory away with herself' (60).

Underlining the text's allegiance to Sarita's viewpoint allows us to interrogate the

portrayal of mothering and a mother's agency in the text, in relation to feminist scholarship

on the subject. Ai's behaviour within the text can be read in the context of multiple and

contradictory discourses on motherhood. A patriarchal discourse of motherhood, with its

emphasis upon grooming children to inhabit specific gender roles, as well as upon an

effacement of one's own self in service of the motherly and wifely roles, would valorise Ai's

performance of motherhood. Her grief after the death of her son is defined by her sense of

sacrifice, as exemplified in her fasting on his birthday and spending the day lying in bed,

'stiff and immobile like a corpse', and a sense of obligation as she fulfils her role of

nurturance in 'get[ting] up and cook[ing] for Saru, serv[ing] her with exaggerated solicitude'

on the day (180).

Simultaneously, however, Ai is not a nurturing mother and does not fulfil such

stereotypical expectations of motherhood.[42] It is clear that Ai recognises mothering as 'work,'

constituting a part of her chores. She inflicts physical violence upon a young Sarita who

disturbs her attempt to neatly comb her hair (113), voices her displeasure at having to cook

for her daughter (177), and even in the abovementioned instance where she *does* fulfil the

expectation of nurturance, it is tinged by a vengeful, accusing silence for her daughter's lack

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[42] It is interesting to consider the ubiquitous nature of this stereotype of nurturance, which forms part of not only traditional expectations of motherhood, but also informs more modern ideologies of motherhood, including the psychoanalytic understanding cited above. The disconcerting presence of this stereotype within feminist criticism was noted by Nina Baym in her review of an early text on mother-daughter relations in Anglo-American female authors' works, in which the authors' 'mother-hatred' (123) as they position themselves as wronged daughters is uncritically accepted by most feminist critics. Nina Baym, review of *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*, ed. By Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Broner, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 5.1 (1982), pp. 123-124.

of mourning for her brother, as well as her own reluctance in fulfilling her motherly role for Sarita. In her relationships with her two children, Ai thus fulfils both criteria through which patriarchal ideologies of bourgeois motherhood identify some mothers as 'demonic' in order to police and control maternal behaviours, those who 'reject their child' and those who 'love to excess'.[43] Indeed, feminist scholarship on mothering, both in the West and in India, has theorised how 'bad' mothering is normally associated with a woman's refusal to adhere to patriarchal norms that dictate her behaviour as a mother. As Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky propose, 'A glance at the "bad" mothers of any age reveals the fate of women who violated the gender norms of their time, whether by choice, by fiat, or by the force of circumstance.'[44] Feminists have reclaimed a woman's identity from its strong associations to motherhood, and presented motherhood as a choice and an imperfect practice. The focus is thus upon combatting the image of the 'bad mother' who 'many mass media representations tend to demonize […] as an aberration,' through revealing the hegemonic function of such demonisation in marginalising women within society.[45]

If we read against the daughter-centricity of our text and privilege Ai's subjectivity, her failure to mother Sarita can thus be read as resistance to the patriarchal notion of a 'nurturing mother' within a specific feminist discourse. We must, however, simultaneously recognise also her collusions with patriarchal hegemony in her son-preference and her grooming of her daughter into the ideal female subject of patriarchal hegemony. Our attempt to complicate the reading of this mother figure thus encompasses both the rupturing of her complete villainisation in the eyes of the daughter/text and the interpellated feminist reader

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[43] Sally Shuttleworth, 'Demonic Mothers: Ideologies of Bourgeois Motherhood in the Mid-Victorian Era', in *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History, and the Politics of Gender*, ed. by Linda M. Shires (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), pp. 31–51 (p. 45).

[44] Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky, 'Introduction', in *Bad Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth Century America* (New York: New York Univerisity Press, 1998), p. 6.

[45] Linda Seidel, *Mediated Maternity: Contemporary American Portrayals of Bad Mothers in Literature and Popular Culture* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), p. xiii.

(which ironically replicates the patriarchal policing of maternal behaviour and thus reinstates patriarchal control of the maternal subject), and a recognition of her perpetuation of patriarchal oppressions as the primary enforcer of family values. By underscoring Ai's ambivalent position, we are thus able to complicate the readings of maternal agency in the bourgeois feminist text to recognise that women's '[t]ransgressions or subversions can perpetuate power structures.'[46] It helps us acknowledge 'bad' mothering, or the failure to mother, as an act that is itself shuttled between its possibilities for resistance and complicity to both patriarchal and feminist discourses on motherhood. It also leads us to question whether there is a mode of cognitive dissonance in our feminist readings, in which some mothers are forgiven and celebrated for their failure at mothering (as a disruption of patriarchy) while others (mothers of feminist daughters) are vilified for the same.

A more complex view of this mother character might thus be developed in recognising the social structures, particularly the patriarchal reward systems, which contextualise her agency. Adrienne Rich argued in her pivotal text on mothering that it is 'easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her.'[47] While Rich's framing of the mother as passively being acted upon adds another danger, that of stripping her of her agency by attributing her faults entirely to false consciousness, the tenet does allow us to shift our focus from her individual culpability to the contexts in which she enacts her transgressive and collusive agencies, and to recognise the various discursive frameworks with which she negotiates. These discursive frameworks in fact becomes visible in the bourgeois feminist text through the protagonist's own negotiations with them, leading to their (unwilling) identification with the mother, through which the text is able to slip in a possible redemption of the mother figure even through a tightly restricted

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[46] Sangari, p. 868.
[47] Rich, p. 235.

first person narration. Our analysis of the mother character in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has allowed us to uncover a particular bias reserved for the mother figure in this genre, which relies upon first-person narration and daughter-centricity, and contributes to the configuration of this fraught mother-daughter relationship. The disidentification that the daughter-protagonist engages in to present the mother as a villainous figure, and her unwilling morphing into that very mother through which we can uncover the discursive frameworks in which female agency is enacted, will be underlined through the following analysis of Deshpande's second novel, *Roots and Shadows*.

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Roots and Shadows

Deshpande's second novel, published in 1983, showcases a large number of thematic and formal similarities with her first, particularly in the trajectory of the prodigal daughter. Indu, a journalist, is summoned to her childhood home by Akka (her great-aunt), 'the rich family tyrant,' who lies on her deathbed and informs the estranged niece of her plan to pass on her inheritance, along with the responsibility of saving the ancestral home and deciding the fate of the entire family, to Indu.[48] The text begins, like *DHNT*, *in media res*, with Indu's memories carrying the reader through various pasts including her childhood, her escape into urban married life, her return after ten years upon Akka's summons, and the following weeks which decide the destiny of the house and family. Written as Indu's autobiographical exploration of her identity and relationship with the family she escaped, as well as of the

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[48] Shashi Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows*, Kindle Ebook (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2012), p. Back Cover. All further references to this primary text are from this edition and will be made within the body of the essay (The Kindle Ebook unfortunately does not provide page numbers, due to which reference will be made here to the chapter number instead.) The abbreviation R&S will be used for this text.

shortcomings of her modern upper middle class existence in Bombay, the novel is presented

with 'an air of objectivity that carries with it a whiff of her profession as a journalist.'[49]

As evident from the blurb's reference to the great-aunt Akka as tyrannical, a

negatively configured relationship between a controlling, dominating figure and the daughter-

protagonist is also central to this second novel. While her death functions to move the

narrative forward through its focus upon her will, so that she 'serv[es] as the architect of the

plot,' she is also denied a complex subjectivity in that she has 'little or no existence apart

from her […] effect upon the destiny of' Indu.[50] The flatness of her character (exacerbated by

the fact that she also remains unnamed outside of the familial moniker 'Akka') is fleshed out

primarily by her misogyny and casteism (elements of her own bargaining with patriarchy in a

manner similar to Ai in *DHNT*) (Chp 2). The narration of her complexities and ambivalent

agency is once more reduced to vicarious redemption through another character, thus

retrenching the trope of 'transpositioning' for these mother characters.[51] *R&S* thus also

clearly inserts itself into the tradition of texts that engage with 'matrophobia' through

positioning its protagonist as the wronged daughter.[52]

Additionally, Indu extends this matrophobia beyond this singular mother figure to the

larger scheme of family women (including aunts, cousins and even the house help) who

populate the text and from whose apparently base lives and battles Indu dissociates herself, as

their continued advocacy of arranged marriages, of not uttering their husbands' name out of

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[49] Batty, p. 58.

[50] Robbins, pp. 132, 6.

[51] Chapter 4 in the novel is dedicated almost entirely to this moment of 'transpositioning', when another woman – Narmada Atya – is allowed to represent Akka's past suffering through an abusive marriage with a cheating husband, and a number of years spent caring for him when he is paralysed, before his death allowed her to assume her widowed role in her natal family and ensured her stability through her inheritance of his wealth. The chapter focuses upon the ambiguity of Akka's agency that encompasses both her diligent performance of a patriarchally mandated wifehood despite her suffering, and her small moments of resistance, such as when she refuses to allow her paralysed husband to see his mistress.

[52] It is interesting that Indu's particular 'matrophobia' which 'unifies the mother and occludes the complexities of her own subjectivity' is aimed at a woman who is not her biological mother, but a surrogate one. The implications of Akka 'failure' at mothering as a surrogate mother will be addressed later in the chapter. Lawler, p. 66.

respect and superstition, or of adhering to the quintessential self-deprivations and sacrifices

of wifehood, motherhood and widowhood induce Indu's rage throughout the narrative.

Through the mother figures in these early novels, Deshpande thus clearly represents what

Steenkamp has theorised as 'the patriarchal woman' inhabiting domestic spaces who 'may

execute their oppression of other women through the manipulation and control of small

spaces' precisely through enacting and enforcing behaviours validated by the patriarchy that

further the interests of the men in the household.[53] Indu's rage at these patriarchal women

betrays what Adrienne Rich names as a 'rage at [her] mothers for having accepted, too

readily and passively [their] victimization,' which Rich plaintively presents as 'mutilat[ing]

the daughter who watches her [mothers] for clues as to what it means to be a woman.'[54] Indu

thus undertakes a project of complete alienation from what she calls 'this breed of women

[…], [e]ach one of them riddled with ignorance, prejudice and superstition [and] a world of

darkness in herself' (Chp 7), thus allowing her to be read (simplistically) by literary critics as

'a rebel' who can be pitted 'against women belonging to the older generation'.[55]

It is clear from Deshpande's representation of the mother figures analysed so far that

the novels engage in a distancing of the reader from the antagonistic mother character. This

distancing is explained by Bruce Robbins in his exposition on the murderous servant figure

as a peripheral character, where it is essential to ensure that '[n]o bonds have been built

between him and the reader, and consequently he can serve his role as the personification of

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[53] Lize-Maree Steenkamp, 'Building Oppressive Proxies: Sudanese and Egyptian Domestic Place and the Production of Patriarchal Femininity in Leila Aboulela's Lyrics Alley', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 57.3 (2020), 592–611 (p. 593). Steenkamp argues that using the concept of the 'patriarchal woman' helps understand homosocial relationships within the domestic space that do not fit into 'the trope of women's domestic places as the potential sites of resistance to patriarchy' (593). The antagonistic mother-daughter relationships under study in this chapter clearly fall outside of this trope precisely because of the varying and hierarchical homosocial dynamics present in the home.

[54] Rich, p. 243.

[55] Qtd by N.K. Prasad and N.D.R. Chandra, 'Feminism in Shashi Deshpande's Roots and Shadows', *Journal of Literature, Culture and Media Studies*, 1.2 (2009), 60–67, p. 61-62.

guilt without involving the reader's feelings.'[56] In these novels, the mothers personify, instead of guilt, a prescribed traditional femininity and agency, making the protagonists' (and implied readers') identifications with or empathy for the character uncomfortable (in a manner reminiscent of the discomfort showcased by feminists with the patriarchally circumscribed agency enacted by Hindutva women). This distance, manifested not only through the textual element of daughter-centricity but also through the narration of the daughter's geographical relocation to an urban space, her pursuing an education and profession, and even marrying against her mother's wishes, allows the daughters to define themselves in opposition to this mother figure and her allegiance to the familial structure. They thus engage in what Rich calls 'a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage,' who stand 'for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr.'[57]

The texts, however, simultaneously present a slow and unwilling identification with the mother's positionality through the daughter's discovery that 'patriarchies are resilient' and insidious, embedded as they are in 'social stratification, divisions of labour, other political structures, religious/ cultural practices, institutions and categories.'[58] Thus, any escape to an 'extra-familial setting' where daughters might want to 'undo their mothers' influence' and reverse the damage caused by gender relations crystallised in the family, whether that be through geographical relocation, education, or marriage, does not provide the expected freedom for the daughter-protagonists from entrenchment in the resilient and discriminatory structures of patriarchal hegemony.[59] Deshpande is especially forceful in her representation of this fallacious belief through the continued patriarchal gender dynamics

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[56] Robbins, p. 153.
[57] Rich, p. 236.
[58] Sangari, p. 868.
[59] Sangari, p. 868; Lawler, p. 66.

visible in both Sarita and Indu's marriages, with the former struggling with marital rape that is traced back in the text to the husband's sense of inferiority because of her being the breadwinner in the family, and the latter coming to terms with her reliance upon and desire to please her husband in ways that are painfully similar to her maligned aunts' relationships with their own husbands (R&S Chp 2,3). The suspension of their professional lives and return to the rural natal home also indicates a particular disillusionment with modern neoliberal India and a critique of the valorised ideal of the 'New Indian Woman', identified by her urban professional identity in the context of 1970s/80s India.[60] In thus presenting the women's disenchantment with all aspects of their 'modern' lives, the text echoes the Indian feminist movement's recognition of the complexities of female agency which is manifested primarily in negotiating with resilient structures of power rather than entirely escaping them.

The texts are therefore riddled with daughters who return home to painfully transform into their mothers, whether through a physical resemblance or through imitating their rituals and traditions, and to be reinscribed within the very gendered and Brahminical[61] milieus and behaviours that they originally wished to evade. In *R&S*, the trope of mirroring and identification between mother and daughter begins with Indu's inheritance of Akka's money and position, which allows Indu to step into the role previously inhabited by Akka of the 'strong wealthy woman' within the family, whom the rest of the family are 'anxious to placate, eager to please' (Chp 4) – a role that she undertakes with an almost hypocritical fervour as she declares, 'It's a wonderful feeling, holding all the answers in my hand (Chp 5). Batty has noted how Deshpande's fiction is characterised by 'operations of memory [that] are rarely limited to […] conscious, discursive retrieval [and] extend to a series of highly

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[60] Bourgeois feminist texts' commentary upon women's position within neoliberalism will be explored further in the fifth chapter.

[61] Batty notes how 'Indu's personal habit of bathing before meals betrays an atavistic religious impulse' even while she overtly presents as 'resent[ing] taboos associated with female cleanliness.' Batty, p. 59.

mediated and sometimes seemingly irrational associations that produce startling moments of clear insight.'[62] This unconscious subtext weaving through Indu's first person narration in *R&S* allows us as readers to note the gaps and silences in the text that finally arrive at our moment of insight into Indu's emulation of Akka even as she overtly determines to 'dominate […] more discriminately, more judiciously' (Chp 8) and expresses herself as being aghast at being considered 'indomitable' like the older woman (Prologue). Reading this undercurrent of Indu's identification with Akka against the her overt disavowal enables us to identify Indu's inheritance and celebration of Akka's small resistances and ambiguous agency, and to re-examine critically the lines apparently drawn between 'modern' and 'traditional' women in the text.

For the critic Manjari Shukla, Indu's eventual identification with Akka is a moment of failure, so that she 'ends up becoming a new but more authoritarian Akka.'[63] Batty reads against Shukla in positing that 'Indu completely *rejects* Akka's authoritarianism as a model for her own behaviour,' a reading in which Akka's villainy is emphasised in presenting 'control of the people closest to her [as] the only power left to her as a rich, but deeply unhappy widow.'[64] My reading of the text, focusing upon the protagonist's attempts at Othering the older woman and her eventual capitulation to the continuities between their agencies, has instead emphasised both women's continued complicities and possible resistances, through exploring their negotiations with the patriarchal framework that they are *both* embedded in, and thus attempted to dilute a binary opposition by highlighting the similar ways in which they form their identities and enact their agencies.[65] Such a reading

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[62] Batty, p. 11.

[63] Manjari Shukla, 'Roots and Shadows: A Small-Scale Forsyte Saga', in *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, ed. by R.S. Pathak (New Delhi: Creative Books, 1998), pp. 97–106 (p. 106).

[64] Batty, pp. 69–70.

[65] In *DHNT*, Deshpande uses similar narrative methods to underline the similarities between Sarita and her mother, from their physical resemblance to Sarita's satisfaction at inhabiting the stereotypically female housewife's role in the household. Batty has noted a particular linguistic slippage within the text's narration where the mother and daughter become merged within the text's use of the pronoun 'she' in a particularly

interrupts the daughter-centric text, instead focusing upon instances of identification that transform the outwardly fraught mother-daughter relationship so that the daughter recognises (even if grudgingly) her mother's position and agency, while processing her own traumas.

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Clear Light of Day

The focus of the analysis thus far has been upon mother figures who are identified by their excessive control over their daughter's lives and their propagation of patriarchal dogmas. It has underscored how the mother's agency navigates between patriarchal and feminist ideals of motherhood, and how the replication of this negotiation in the daughter's own life presents the possibility of recouping the mother from her villainous role. The chapter has also highlighted how 'bad' mothering, seen in the figures of Ai and Akka above in their lack of expected maternal nurturance, can in fact function as a form of resistance to the patriarchal ideal of motherhood which exerts control over women. This argument about 'bad' mothering as resistance can more clearly be elucidated by a very short analysis of another text published in this decade, namely Anita Desai's 1980 novel *Clear Light of Day*, which presents a different peripheral mother figure, one who resists the patriarchal maternal ideal by *refusing* to bear its responsibilities. [66] The mother figure in this text is marked, not by *excessive*

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significant incident, which allows for both their blurred subjectivities to be understood as skeletons locked, perhaps together, in the family cupboard. The primary form of identification between the two women, however, is ironically embedded in their 'bad' mothering. The text is scattered with references to the difficult relationship Sarita has with her uncannily quiet, grim and observant daughter Renu. The secrets, silences and matrophobia which haunt the relationships between Ai and Sarita, and Sarita and Renu, contribute to the 'transgenerational haunting' that Batty theorises as a recurrent theme within Deshpande's fiction. The text might thus be read as concurring with the 'cycles of deprivation' theory, in which a woman's own bad experiences of being mothered hamper her ability to provide mothering to her daughter, leaving the women stuck in a cycle, endlessly bequeathing a legacy of their dissatisfactions, failures and trauma. Sarita mirroring her mother's failure at mothering opens up the possibility of empathy for her mother's position, and allows us to conjecture, with Sarita as our template, that her mother's own daughterhood, though unexplored within the text, was similarly fraught. Batty, pp. 87, xxxviii.

[66] Women's relationships with the maternal function are an important and central feature in a number of Desai's texts written both before and after *CLOD*. Several critics have interrogated the representation of mother figures in Desai's early texts like *Voices in the City* (1965), *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975) and *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), both as protagonists and 'the shadowy penumbra surrounding…protagonists' (Chakravarty, p.

patriarchal agency, but by her particular passivity, stagnation, inaccessibility to her children, and reticence.[67] Her clear abdication of her mothering responsibilities makes her one of literature's '"custodial" mothers who are physically present but emotionally absent.'[68] This remoteness and reticence as a mother (she remains physically sequestered in rooms of the house to which her children do not have access, and her first words in the text do not appear until page 77) can be read as participating in what Jack Halberstam has theorised as 'a shadow archive of resistance, one that does not speak in the language of action and momentum but instead articulates itself in terms of evacuation, refusal, passivity, unbecoming, unbeing.'[69] Her absence upon her death in the middle of the novel does not surprise the children, who find it difficult to 'remember always that she was not at the club, but dead' (82). The text notes in fact that the house is haunted, not by the mother's death or absence, but the children's secret and guilty indifference to this death (82).

This mother figure thus adds to the canon of mothers whose 'negative' agency (where negative is read as 'wrongful' or 'bad', but also as a lack of action), as Chakravarty argues, 'is inadmissible in hegemonic cultural narratives,' and can be imbued with an ethos of silent protest when we agree to 'the association of failure with nonconformity [and] nonreproductive lifestyles.'[70] The mother in *CLOD* thus helps us continue a recognition of these peripheral mother characters as fulfilling the paradigms of maternal resistance as theorised by feminists, through their 'demonic mother[ing]' that 'violate[s] the gender norms

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77). See Chanda, 'Mapping Motherhood: The Fiction of Anita Desai', p. 77,80-81; Mann, pp. 89–90; Radha Chakravarty, 'Figuring the Maternal: "Freedom" and "Responsibility" in Anita Desai's Novels', *ARIEL*, 29.2 (1998), 75–92; Ramanathan. This preoccupation with the maternal continues in texts following after *CLOD*, such as *Journey to Ithaca* (1995), which will be referred to later in this chapter.

[67] Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day*, Vintage (Gurgaon: Random House India, 2007). All further references to this text are from this edition and will be made within the body of the essay. It will be referred to using the abbreviation *CLOD*.

[68] Mickey Pearlman, qtd. in Podnieks and O'Reilly, p. 13.

[69] Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 129.

[70] Halberstam, p. 129.

of their time,' thus permitting a reading of their agential complexities through both their collusions and resistances.

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The analysis of the three texts so far has thus been able to unearth very specific thematic and form-based recurrences in the treatment of mothers and daughters in these texts. We have read the repeated presence of fraught mother-daughter relationships as a sublimation or privatisation of epistemic shifts in the economic and political milieu of the late 1970s and early 1980s where we can posit the mother *versus* daughter trope as standing in for a battle between the old and the new. However, as our analysis has also shown, these lines between mother and daughter, and old and new, are blurred by the collusions and resistances enacted by both women to patriarchal and feminist discourses of womanhood. While some critics, whose readings of this genre have been explored in the first chapter, understand this ambiguity as a surrender or capitulation to patriarchal hegemony, this thesis would like to posit that such blurring, and the daughter-protagonist's resistance to it, in fact highlights the complexities of female agency as well as a discomfort (the very same that these critics' arguments reflect) with such ambiguous agency which remains within the purview of a traditional patriarchal framework and negotiates with it instead of escaping it.

As the second chapter has demonstrated, these conversations surrounding female agency that is actively abrasive to a feminist ideal of female solidarity against patriarchy build to a crescendo in the 1990s as feminists contemplate the intersectionalities of female identity that prevent such unity, with particular regard to women's participation in public events – both social and economic – on the *wrong side* of the feminist versus patriarchal binary. The tenacity of this trope of a mother and daughter at odds with one another and the daughter's eventual reconciliation with her own and her mother's equally murky positions on

the feminist-patriarchal spectrum can thus be read as the genre's contemplation, in the early 1980s, of the futility of mother/daughter, old/new, traditional/modern, passive/resistant binaries and its attempts at disrupting them to present more complex female subjectivities. Moving the focus away from the daughter-protagonist to the peripheral mother and her relationship to the central figure allows the text's representation of 'everyday resistances' and negotiations with discursive frameworks to become apparent, so that both the protagonist's lack of a final, radical moment of resistance, and the contradiction in the genre's treatment of feminist ideals, where 'a disdain for organized feminism […] is matched by deeply feminist preoccupations and musings,' perhaps become more remissible.[71]

Rescuing the trope of the 'bad' mother from the texts' daughter-centricity also allows us to read in the texts an unequivocal critique of a hegemonic narrative of motherhood as a fulfilling role for women, and highlights how this narrative is central not only to patriarchal discourses and familial structures, but also permeates into feminist, or more specifically, feminist daughters' discourses about their own mothers. It thus becomes possible to allow even mothers of feminist daughters to make their attitudes towards motherhood 'the site for the articulation of the female desire to determine one's own identity, in confrontation with traditional inscriptions of the mother's body as a means of controlling female subjectivity,' while acknowledging that this 'resistance' might yet collude with, or remain within the bounds of, patriarchal tenets in some ways.[72]

While this chapter has focused upon mother/daughter dyads from texts published in the 1980s, thus presenting their conflictual relationship as a rooted phenomenon that reflects a specific context, it is important to note the continued propagation of such binary representations. As Robbins notes of the trope of the servant, this troubling mother character

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[71] Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*, Calfornia Paperback Printing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 135.
[72] Chakravarty, p. 77.

marked by her 'negative' agency retains an ahistoricity and intertextuality derived from cultural ideas about good and bad mothering which have remained relatively static despite large epistemic shifts in women's conditions and the scope of their agential influence, which therefore allow the tropes identified in these texts from the 1980s to echo from old epics like the *Ramayana*, as well as to resurface in television serials in the new millennium.[73] Even within the genre of bourgeois feminist fiction, the figure of the mother as Steenkamp's 'patriarchal woman' who colludes with patriarchal dogmas to the detriment of her daughter's liberties does not disappear in the following decades (and thus prevents us from trapping the analysis within a fallacious chronology). We can, however, still trace a subtle yet important shift in the pattern of representation of the mother-daughter friction that presents the possibility of moving past the aforementioned discomfort with women's compounded affiliations, identities and agencies, in the endings of two novels published in the 1990s, namely Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) and Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). [74]

The Thousand Faces of Night; Fasting Feasting

Both Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* and Desai's *Fasting Feasting* feature the daughter-protagonists' villainised mothers who once again punctiliously fulfil the tropes

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[73] Fraught relationships between older and younger women are particularly represented on television by the conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. The trope of evil mother-in-law is a prolific feature in a number of TV series placed under the derogatory moniker of *saas-bahu* (mother-in-law-daughter-in-law) serials, some of which continue into present day (Examples are *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* (2009-present) and *Yeh Rishte Hain Pyaar Ke* (2019-present)). These shows focus upon 'the eternal rivalry,' as Shoma Munshi puts it, of the in-law women so that the 'constantly sacrificing' daughters-in-law are pitted against the mother-in-law who represents 'the anachronistic joint family system and archaic lifestyles.' The narratives clearly rely then upon the 'uneasy collectivity' of women, presenting no possibility of their solidarity. Shoma Munshi, *Prime Time Soap Operas on Indian Television* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010).

[74] The analysis of *Fasting, Feasting* in this chapter is restricted to the first section of the text in which the daughter Uma is at the centre of the exposition and the mother figure is featured. The second section is focused on the son Arun's experiences in the United States. The 'ending' mentioned here is therefore the ending of the first section.

established so far for this figure in the bourgeois feminist text.[75] When we move past the acknowledgement of these continuities, however, it becomes possible to extract some subtle changes in the maternal representations that help us connect these characters to the mother figures to be studied in the next chapter in texts that are defined by their polyphony.

Such polyphony is augured in Hariharan and Desai's texts by a single change, which is the mother character's being alive in the present narration of the text, rather than being committed to memory.[76] While *FF*'s protagonist Uma remains central to the free indirect narration of her section of the text, *TFON* furthers this reading of polyphony through its inclusion of a chapter from the mother Sita's perspective in the final section of the novel.[77] The more dynamic presence of these peripheral mothers' subjectivities allows for a foregrounding of their subtle resistances and expert manoeuvring of social expectations without their being buried within a daughter-centric narration, thus allowing for a more robust acknowledgement of the manner in which the very family that is marked as an oppressive patriarchal force can become a possible site of agency and domination for a woman who flits between defiance and enforcement of hegemonic behaviours, both of which bely a strong agency.[78]

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[75] Githa Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night* (Gurgaon: Penguin India, 1992); Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting* (Noida: Random House India, 2014). All further references to these text are from these editions and will be made within the body of the essay. They will be referred to using the abbreviations *TFON* and *FF*, respectively.

[76] This assertion admittedly risks a flattening of maternal representations if we do not acknowledge that this shift stands true only for the texts under study here, and does not necessarily reflect in all the texts (or other forms of popular culture) published in the 1980s and 90s.

[77] Interestingly, this inclusion of the mother's perspective still presents almost like a villain's monologue, as the metanarrative contemplates, 'What could [the daughter] Devi, the innocent heroine who strayed unknowingly into [the mother] Sita's script, do once the drama unfolded to reveal a life, a will of its own?' (107).

[78] For example, in *TFON*, Hariharan uses the 'veena episode' to showcase such manoeuvring, when admonition from Sita's father-in-law for neglecting her duties as wife and daughter-in-law in practising her veena leads her to cut the strings of the veena 'with a discordant twang of protest' and to give up the instrument entirely (30). This scene, which can be read simply as the family system 'browbeat[ing]' women 'into submission to its structures' (Sunder Rajan), in fact is curiously charged with strong action. The cutting of the strings in marked protest presents a complex moment of anger, defiance and submission that evokes Deleuze's remark upon 'the masochist's apparent obedience [which] conceals a criticism and a provocation.' The moment defines Sita's movement from an overt defiance of the norms to a more insidious negotiation with the ideals of patriarchy after her determined transformation into the ideal bourgeois wife and daughter-in-law, through which her agency is sublimated in ways that are accepted and even celebrated within family structures, and which allow her to take

The shift in these texts' representation of peripheral mothers is most pronounced in their endings, which directly portray the possibility of resolution and solidarity between the mother and daughter. While the three texts from the 1980s analysed above began with the daughter's return to the natal home, *TFON* ends with such a return to home and mother, which is built, moreover, upon the daughter's active empathy for and identification with her mother, to whom she intends to 'offer her […] love' with 'an unflinching look', and 'to stay and fight' for their relationship, showcasing a determination that does not feature in her relationships with any of the three men in her life (139). She thus differs from the previously analysed daughter-protagonists who are pulled into identification with their mothers *unwillingly* (through their resemblance to and mirroring of them), so that 'the centrality and significance of the powerfully delineated relationship' between mother and daughter that has featured through all the texts studied so far becomes most consolidated in *TFON*, where it becomes a refuge and a final destination for the daughter-protagonist instead of a passage at the end of which is a return to the heteronormative familial structure and to her role as wife and mother.[79]

In *FF*, Desai also presents similarly powerful moments of solidarity between mother and daughter through their camaraderie and the moments of affection that are peppered through the text, as well as through Uma's section of the text ending on a moment of tenderness between Mama and Uma who clasp hands and are consoled by 'thinking they are together still, they have the comfort of each other,' thus showcasing again the possibility of resolution and solidarity for mother and daughter (*FF*, 158). Such harmony once again augurs the forms of mother-daughter relations that are to be examined in the next chapter, which

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control over the family home, and the lives of her husband and daughter. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, 'The Heroine's Progress in Recent Women's Fiction', *India International Centre Quarterly*, 23.3/4 (1996), 222–38 (p. 230); Gilles Deleuze, 'Coldness and Cruelty', in *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*, trans. by Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1989), pp. 9–142 (p. 88).

[79] Sunder Rajan, 'The Heroine's Progress', p. 230.

foregrounds a comradeship between the women while also maintaining their differing

discursive affiliations with everchanging forms of both 'modernity' and 'tradition'. It thus

moves away from the 'uneasy collectivity' of women featured in the previous texts, and

allows instead for 'the subversive possibility of a cultural grouping' of women that resists the

fragmentation ingrained in intergenerational female-female relationships within patriarchal

family structures.[80]

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The very final sections of this chapter move away from a focus upon women who use their

mothering function as a form of resistance in itself, to instead highlight those who remain at

the peripheries of family structures and do not fulfil a heteronormative expectation of

wifehood and (biological) motherhood, and therefore adopt motherhood, religion or madness

as patriarchally sanctioned forms of female agency that help them maintain positions within

the traditional family structure. This pattern warrants our focus in this chapter since the

novels of the 1980s are particularly suited to the presence of such characters due to the lacuna

left behind by the biological mother's absence that can then be filled by the mother surrogate.

Such a sequence is present in three of the hitherto analysed texts, namely *Roots and Shadows*,

Clear Light of Day, and *Fasting, Feasting*.

Roots and Shadows (surrogate mothering as agency)

The analysis of Shashi Deshpande's second novel undertaken above noted that the villainised

mother figure is not the protagonist's biological mother but her great-aunt, Akka. Indu's own

mother's absence (through her death at childbirth) is an important trajectory in Indu's

bildungsroman (and a common feature in *bildungsromans* generally, perhaps most

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[80] Aneja and Vaidya, p. 59.

distinctively featured in the orphans that populate the Dickensian *bildungsroman*[81]), and one which is recognised as another 'point around which maternal ideals are articulated and reinforced. As the family and social order collapse without the mother, the novels prove her fundamental importance.'[82] The mother's absence is thus seen as a particularly severe lack, for both the child/family, as well as for society. However, this 'social order collapse' theorised within the Western context as resulting from the mother's absence in a nuclear family structure is replaced in the Indian familial context by a tradition of group surrogate mothering, which is visible in *R&S* through the battalion of aunts who take responsibility for Indu's upbringing.

Sangeeta Dutta notes this as a regular feature in the traditional Indian family, stating that, '[i]n the joint-family system, surrogate mothering has been evident; widows have mothered children, older daughters have reared younger siblings.'[83] Deshpande thus presents a trope reflecting not only a common practice, but also a tradition within Indian literature of depicting the childless widow who must raise the children in the family. Dutta remarks upon the portrayal of this figure in Raja Rao's short story 'Akkayya' (1947), which explores the suffering and frustration of 'a child widow without a name, who spends her long life bringing up orphaned children in the family.'[84] The widowed aunts who feature in *R&S*, as well as *CLOD* and *FF*, thus follow in Akkayya's footsteps by returning to their natal homes upon widowhood to be of service to the family as mother surrogates.[85]

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[81] Aleksander Stevic, 'Fatal Extraction: Dickensian Bildungsroman and the Logic of Dependency', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 45 (2014), 63–94 (p. 64).

[82] Greenfield, qtd. in Podnieks and O'Reilly, p. 10.

[83] Sangeeta Dutta, 'Relinquishing the Halo: Portrayal of Mother in Indian Writing in English', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25.42–43 (1990), WS84–94 (p. 84).Sangeeta Dutta, 'Relinquishing the Halo: Portrayal of Mother in Indian Writing in English', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25.42–43 (1990), WS84–94 (p. 84).

[84] Dutta, p. 87.

[85] Susie Tharu's 1996 essay examines the possible agencies and subjectivities available to this widow figure in fiction, noting specifically 'how large the figure of the Hindu widow looms' in the canon of Indian literatures (1311). Susie Tharu, 'The Impossible Subject: Caste and the Gendered Body', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31.22 (1996), 1311–15.

The trope of the widowed aunt who undertakes this mothering function is thus strongly reliant upon the nostalgic structure of the joint family living in the big ancestral house which commonly features in these bourgeois feminist texts as the milieu to which the daughter-protagonist returns while, importantly, leaving behind her own urban, 'modern', nuclear family structure. Through this structure, the discursive space that allows the widowed aunt to co-opt the mothering function is framed by the authors as a particularly traditional and fast-disappearing terrain for female agency. In *Roots and Shadows*, Deshpande poignantly reflects this shift when one of the widowed aunts is forced to move into Indu's urban apartment once the ancestral home is demolished, where she leads a 'listless, apathetic' existence marked by a continued adherence to 'her regulated widow's way of living' that is represented as discordant with her new surroundings (Chp 1), which is placed in stark contrast to her bustling maternal centrality to the joint family structure in the ancestral home, in which she presided over all the household work while also undertaking to 'relieve [any] tired, irritable young mother of her burden' (Chp 3). [86]

The texts thus document another moment of transition from old to new and its particular impact upon the arena of female agency, with this thematic preoccupation echoing what the Indian Government's approach paper for the United Nations International Year of the Family in 1994 would also emphasise in the next decade – the traditional family system's 'instability and disintegration' caused by 'socio-economic changes, market forces, consumerism and environment degradation' in these final decades of the twentieth century.[87] This disintegration is represented in the bourgeois feminist texts of the following decades by the disappearance of surrogate mothering in the forms they take here, along with the agency

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[86] The metonymic function of the decaying or demolished ancestral house, which becomes a brooding obsession in the bourgeois feminist text, will be examined in the next chapter through its deeper engagement with ideas of nostalgia.

[87] Qtd. in Sanjukta Dasgupta and Malashri Lal, 'Introduction', in *The Indian Family in Transition: Reading Literary and Cultural Texts* (New Delhi: Sage, 2007), pp. 11–31 (p. 12).

embedded in the position which allows these women to inhabit spaces and roles in the family that would otherwise be withheld from them.

In the ancestral home at the centre of *Roots and Shadows*, such possibilities for agency are best represented by Akka, who features as a powerful matriarch whose co-option of the mothering function allows her authority and legitimacy within the family system. As a woman stripped of her sanctioned role of wifehood through the death of her husband and her return to the natal home, Akka assumes the maternal role within her brother's family which grants women 'the power of parental discipline as an opportunity to exercise an authority denied to [them] in other areas of [their] life,' which allows Akka's influence to extend over her nieces and nephews, as well their offspring.[88] In representing the possibility of deriving such power through surrogate mothering, Deshpande subverts the trope of the suffering widow against which Raja Rao was writing decades earlier. Akka's seizing of control can thus be read as resisting patriarchal mandates of a widow showcasing modest and deferential behaviour and leading a necessarily parasitic existence at the peripheries of the family. Indrani Karmakar's in-depth exploration of surrogate mother figures highlights the complex, ambivalent position inhabited by characters like Akka whose 'singular position at the interstitial space of motherhood and non-motherhood is potent enough to challenge the biological paradigm' while also 'occupy[ing] an interstitial space between subversion and submission.'[89]

Akka's co-optation of this mothering function which encompasses both subversion and submission presents interesting parallels, in both literature and in the political milieu. In her study of the representation of motherhood in Anita Desai's fiction, Radha Chakravarty explores a similar co-optation in Desai's *Journey to Ithaca* (1996), in which the protagonist

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[88] Chakravarty, p. 77.
[89] Karmakar, p. 137.

Laila is presented as 'The Mother' within a religious/ spiritual context, as she controls her ashram and guides her pupils. Chakravarty notes how adopting this mother function is 'a process of female self-empowerment which represents Desai's ironic appropriation of the patriarchal formulation of "femininity as maternity".' This mothering is marked, however, by 'a negation of the traditional attributes of maternity, because her elevated status is based on ascetic renunciation,' thus creating a parallel with Akka's lack of maternal nurturance that Indu comments upon (as seen in the previous analysis of her as a 'bad' mother).[90] A similarly matronly, ascetic leadership is identified by Amrita Basu in her study of three Hindutva women, Sadhvi Rithambara, Uma Bharati and Vijayraje Scindia, whose 'chastity heightens their iconic status' through its associations with Hindu spirituality.[91]

The most explicit historic parallel to Akka is presented through the figure of India's third (and only female) Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, in her similar characterisation as the authoritarian widow figure whose association with a 'mothering' role (evidenced by her first major biography being titled *Mother India*) provides legitimacy to the power she wields in the very public sphere of national politics.[92] This connection between Akka and Gandhi is made explicit by Deshpande's own association of the narrative with the Emergency of 1975-77 which 'brought in the idea of […] complete power' and more specifically, complete power wielded by a woman.[93] Like Akka, Gandhi's own agency and the legacy she has left behind as India's first female Prime Minister is complex – she was 'the Iron Lady of India' who led

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[90] Chakravarty, p. 88.

[91] Basu, 'Feminism Inverted: The Gendered Imagery and Real Women of Hindu Nationalism', p. 161. The role of these three female Hindutva icons in the movement has been addressed in Chapter 2. The relationship between religion and mothering in these texts is going to be more deeply explored in the next section of this chapter.

[92] Pranay Gupte, *Mother India: A Political Biography of Indira Gandhi* (New York City: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992).

[93] Deshpande, 'In First Person', p. 12. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency in 1975 to curb internal unrest. The Emergency lasted until 1977. A number of human rights violations were reported during this period.

India to victory in war against Pakistan in 1971, 'The Widow'[94] and mother of two sons who is distinguished by her traditional saris, as well as the villainous figure who declared a draconian, two-year state of emergency and arrested her critics in the aftermath of her indictment for electoral malpractice in 1975. Gandhi resisted the stereotype of a 'supposedly malleable woman' and fought against the misogynistic moniker of '*goongi gudiya*' ('dumb doll') through developing her firm leadership style.[95] Simultaneously, her power allowed for her exercising severe control over the Indian population during her tenures as Prime Minister, with the Indian democracy coming closest to autocratic rule, marked by election suspensions, censorship, withdrawal of civil liberties, and even coerced sterilisation of working class men, under its only female Prime Minister. Indira Gandhi thus epitomises the complex locations women inhabit and the agencies they enact in conservative patriarchal spaces through harnessing the 'mothering' role to their advantage, at the very apex of national politics.

Akka's particular grasp at power through utilising a mother function as possible sublimation can thus be recognised as fulfilling a tradition within religious and political spheres, where women grapple with a number of discursive allegiances and inhabit complex agential positions that both collude with and resist patriarchal injunctions.[96] Like Akka, the agencies reflected in the historical or literary figures mentioned above clearly remain mired within a patriarchal discourse of womanhood, with their resistances taking the shape of subtle deviations from idealised norms and often reinforcing patriarchal frameworks. Deshpande's representation of surrogate mothering in *Roots and Shadows* thus reinforces the arguments made so far about the function of peripheral mother figures in the bourgeois feminist text,

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[94] This title is bestowed upon Gandhi in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), in which she remains otherwise unnamed.

[95] Blema S. Steinberg, *Women in Power: The Personalities and Leadership Styles of Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir, and Margaret Thatcher* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), p. 26.

[96] Such sublimation of women's political functions into familial labels continues to be visible in female Indian leaders in contemporary politics, with the Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee (referred to as 'Didi' or 'elder sister') and J. Jayalalithaa (referred to as 'Amma' or 'mother') serving as the most popular instances.

which is to highlight an uncomfortable nebulousness in women's relationships with power and agency that is particularly central to their familial roles, and the daughter-protagonist's/text's particular mix of condemnation and nostalgia for the family structures that allow for surrogate mother figures like Akka to dominate, reifies this sense of discomfort within the text itself.

Clear Light of Day (madness as agency)

In Anita Desai's *CLOD*, Radha Chakravarty notes the representation of a 'surprisingly large number of characters who are single women, surviving on the periphery of a society that regards marriage and motherhood as the primary female goal.'[97] Most of these women (including the protagonist Bim, the widowed aunt Mira Masi, as well as the neighbouring Misra sisters who return to their natal home and take responsibility for the house and their brothers) undertake, like Akka and the historical and literary figures scrutinised above, surrogate mothering roles that help sublimate their non-conforming agencies and positions in a patriarchal system.

However, in this novel, Desai also underlines forms of agency other than surrogate mothering that are available to women within a patriarchal discursive framework, most notably, madness (which remains, however, connected to surrogate mothering, allowing these figures to utilise more than one avenue available to them to deviate from patriarchal restrictions). In *CLOD*, Mira Masi's slow descent into alcohol-induced delusions is ironically connected directly to her surrogate mother function, with her presentation as 'the tree that grew in the centre of [the children's] lives' (169) from whom they draw sustenance until she is left as 'just the old log, the dried mass of roots on which they grew' (171).[98] This

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[97] Chakravarty, p. 84.

[98] Such a critique of the mothering role by Desai plainly contradicts the argument that has been made so far about mothering providing a form of identity and agency to women who are otherwise relegated to the

representation of a surrender to her mothering function leading her into the realm of madness

concurs with feminist explorations of female madness which have argued that there has

historically been a 'pathologisation of women's reasonable response to restricted and

repressive lives.'[99]

The representation also projects, however, the possibility of such 'madness' as escape

from these very restrictions and repressions, particularly in the Indian context where a rupture

of patriarchal norms through 'madness' is linked to the prevalence and acceptance of a

tradition of spiritual possession that is rooted in an ancient belief that 'both physical and

mental disease […] come from outside the person.'[100] Radha Kumar has noted this

convergence of notions of insanity and religion as a possible avenue for agency, in recording

'the way in which women simulate possession by the *devi* (or goddess), particularly at times

of pregnancy, in order to wrest concessions from their husbands or families which would not

otherwise have been given.' These forms of possession have been used by women, Kumar

observes, to demand special foods or money, or even to reform alcoholic husbands.[101]

Desai's representation of Mira Masi's madness in *CLOD* as a possible form of escape can

thus be connected to a particular discursive tradition of Indian women's experience of

'hysteria', which is carried even further by Desai in portraying another widowed aunt in

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peripheries of the family structure. Indrani Karmakar's reading of this character in fact does highlight the positive connotations of the tree imagery used for Mira Masi in this novel which arguably invokes 'a kind of organic oneness with mother nature' that indicates 'the naturalness of the supposedly unnatural (non-biological) mother-child relationships' portrayed in the text (122). Desai's engagement with the idea of mothering is, however, clearly complex and encompasses both its agentic possibilities and its demands of soul-crushing sacrifice, and the attempt here is to retain this complexity as we study the representation of these mother figures.

[99] Jane M. Ussher, *The Madness of Women: Myth and Experience* (Hove: Routledge, 2011), p. 11.

[100] June McDaniel, *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 11.

[101] Radha Kumar, *A History Of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 1993), pp. 145–46; While Kumar understands such possession as deliberate performance in order to extract these benefits, according to Sudhir Kakar, 'the wide prevalence of hysteria among Indian women and their…seeing themselves [as] the passive vehicles of gods and goddesses' reflects social conditions of women's suppressed frustrations. Kakar, qtd. in Kishwar Ahmed Shirali, 'Madness and Power in India', *Canadian Woman Studies*, 17.1 (1997), 66–71 (p. 67). Shirali, in her article, presents numerous empirical instances of the manner in which possession is utilised by women (both Hindu and Muslim) to circumvent their traditional subordinations with family or social systems.

Fasting Feasting, also named Mira-masi, who is identified by both her religiosity as well as her possible irrationalities.

Fasting Feasting (religion as agency)

Desai's use of the name 'Mira' for the widowed aunt in both these novels plays a particular function for their characterisation in its being popularly identified with the 16th century Indian mystic and poet Mirabai.[102] This link is encouraged by Mirabai's mention in *FF* for her religious devotion to Lord Krishna as well as her being 'considered a madwoman,' and who echoes the Miras of Desai's texts in that she exists outside the heteronormative framework through rejecting her marriage in favour of religion (40). The widowed aunt in *FF* showcases the possible liberations of a religious life, through the freedom and independence awarded by her pilgrimages across the country, in which her widowhood functions as a privilege, with her 'widow's white garments' offering safety (38). Desai presents her as a strongly agential character, marked by her command over the familiar space of the temple (41), her 'youthful energy' (53) and her function in the text as offering the daughter-protagonist Uma, who remains mired within her home and her daughterly functions, a possible route of liberation through the 'abandonment' offered in religion (58).[103]

While this Mira-masi is also identified with a form of 'madness', so that she can be categorised as one of the 'mad widows […] in the streets of Benares'[104](142), Desai deftly

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[102] Mirabai is one of the most well-known saints from the 'Bhakti' movement of the 16th century which disrupted the dominance of the priestly class and emphasised a direct relationship with God. She is particularly associated with devotional hymns praising the Hindu God Krishna, many of which are believed to be written by her. Her resistance to social convention (particularly in abandoning her husband and considering Lord Krishna as her spouse instead) has marked her as an Indian feminist icon, in addition to her already established position as a folk hero in northern India.

[103] This widowed aunt's surrogate motherhood is enacted, not through providing physical sustenance to the daughter-protagonist or inducting her into womanhood as most other widowed aunts do in their texts, but through a nurturing mentorship that presents, as noted here, a possibility of liberation for the protagonist by following in this aunt's footsteps.

[104] The north Indian city of Benares or Varanasi, located on the banks of the holy river Ganga, is a pilgrimage site for Hindus. Widowed Hindu women often find their way to the city to live in one of the many ashrams (hermitages) established for them when their families shun or abandon them after their husbands' deaths.

showcases how, in contrast to the containment endured by *CLOD's* Mira because of her madness, religious belief excuses *this* Mira's delusions and leads to her freedom when the crowds surrounding her in the Benaras street believe her prophetic dream and celebrate it with her (143). The representation of such a celebration of religious 'madness' is derived from a long tradition of female mysticism, from 'the *Akka Mahadevis* of the south and the *Lal-Deds* […] of Kashmir [who] let down their hair, and roamed the country singing in ecstasy,' which allows women to invert a narrative of passivity to embody 'fearsome visages of Shakti' (The Female Principle) that provides liberation from heteronormative family structures, from the necessary sexualisation of the female body, and importantly, the assignation of a maternal function.[105] Desai thus utilises this Mira-masi's trajectory in the novel as a representation of the possibilities for female agency within a (patriarchal) religious framework, particularly for widowed women.

This representation can serve as a starting point to undertake, in the final section of this chapter, an exploration of the particular connections made between religiosity and mother characters in all the texts that have been studied here, which allows for a strong and important linkage between these texts' contemplation of female agency and that undertaken by feminist critics in their study of religion's codification in society, the relationship between mothering and religion (goddess worship), and the important public and private functions of religion in women's lives (which have been explored in the second chapter) that contribute to the complication of our theorisations of female agency.

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[105] Shirali, p. 69. Akka Mahadevi and Lal Ded are female ascetics from the 12th and 14th centuries respectively, who are celebrated for their abandonment of home and family in service of their devotion to their gods. 'Shakti' refers to the Hindu Creator Goddess who is identified with female cosmic energy and is often invoked in the context of women's strength and endurance. Shirali, along with other feminist critics, also interestingly questions the particular use of 'madness' to describe women's spiritual experiences, while male experiences are associated with the salvation or being 'realized'.

Religious Agency

The focus on Hindutva in Chapter 2 of this thesis has made evident that religion is central to feminist conversations around female agency because these conversations notably resulted from issues surrounding women's relationship to their religious identities, and fractures caused by these affiliations in a united feminist movement. While later novels (published in the 2000s) engage more directly with women's participation in public events related to Hindutva (namely the Babri Masjid demolition of 1992 and the Godhra riots of 2002), the texts from the 1980s and 1990s studied in this chapter, which remain within the familial sphere, can be seen grappling with the issue more subliminally, through their representation of women's religiosity as well as their caste affiliations, which, in being represented primarily through the peripheral mother figure, becomes a space for the daughter-centric text to express a sense of discomfort with religion.

In all five texts analysed in this chapter, religion and caste play an important role in locating the peripheral mother characters' traditional functions within the text. In *DHNT*, Sarita's first reference to her mother is in conjuring up an image of her 'standing in front of the tulsi [holy basil plant], eyes closed, hands folded, lips moving,' presumably praying that 'she [may die] before her husband' (*DHNT*, 15).[106] The mother's present-continuous action of praying embalms her in the Hindu female identity of a good, loyal wife, and comes to stand for her cultural rootedness. Similarly, Akka's Brahminical (upper caste) superciliousness is particularly foregrounded in *R&S*, while *CLOD*'s Aunt Mira is the character who is made to articulate a Hindu-Muslim binary in her disapproval of the children's intimacy with the neighbouring Muslim family of Hyder Ali Sahib (*CLOD*, 85).

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[106] The holy basil plant is considered representative of the Goddess Lakshmi and is planted in courtyards in Hindu homes. Young women married into the family are expected to pray to and care for the plant on a daily basis.

These mother characters are thus associated specifically with their Hindu and upper caste Brahmin identities, representing both the women and their religiosity in a pejorative light.

Even *FF*'s Mira-masi, while embodying the possibility of escape through religion, simultaneously betrays Brahminical compunctions of hygiene and purity (41), prejudices against Muslims (56), and strictly follows the mandates of widowed life in her white clothing and 'single and vegetarian meal of the day' (39).[107] Hariharan's *TFON* portrays a similar ambivalence; while the protagonist Devi's mother-in-law escapes her roles as wife, mother and daughter-in-law through religion by choosing the life of an ascetic (63), her housekeeper Mayamma suffers through gory religious rituals (inflicted by her merciless mother-in-law) in order to be blessed with a male child.[108] Yet, Mayamma remains, along with Devi's grandmother, her central source of the Hindu mythology which permeates every section of the narrative, with the voices of women from religious texts, including Damayanti, Gandhari, Sita and Draupadi[109], being channelled through these women, making them arbiters of wisdom upon hegemonic Indian (Hindu) womanhood within the text.

Sangeeta Dutta, in her analysis of the representation of motherhood in Indian English writing, quotes Nirad C. Chaudhuri's aphorism that 'In a society where religion permeates all

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[107] In Hinduism, widows are expected to follow strict rituals of deprivation including not wearing colourful clothing, shaving their hair, remaining unadorned (that is, without jewellery of any kind), and showcasing strong religious devotion including through fasting and only eating simple food (in order to prevent exciting the senses with spice, oil or meat).

[108] Mayamma narrates her 'weekly fasts' to appease the gods so that she might be blessed with a child, as well as her mother-in-law's attempts to make her fertile by 'smear[ing] burning red, freshly-ground spices into [her] barrenness', bathing a religious statue with blood collected from cutting Mayamma's right breast, and denying her food while telling her to 'think of [her] empty, rotting womb and pray' (113-14). Hariharan highlights here the ritualistic degradation of women by families that desire the birth of children and attempt to hasten the event by asking the woman to suffer superstitious rites of fertility.

[109] Damayanti is a character from the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* who is abandoned by her husband and must undergo several trials before she is reunited with him, thus figuring as a symbol of suffering and loyal love. Gandhari, also from the *Mahabharata*, is identified by her ferocious wifely loyalty because of her decision to blindfold herself for the rest of her life upon finding out that her new husband is blind (a fact hidden from her before the marriage). Sita is the (once again) loyal, suffering heroine of the *Ramayana* who dutifully follows her husband into exile and remains devoted to him when she is kidnapped by the villain of the narrative and kept captive in his kingdom. Draupadi, another *Mahabharata* character, is remembered for her trials as she goes into exile with her husbands and is used as a pawn in their conflicts, having been 'lost' (as a possession) by one of her husbands in a game of dice and humiliated by his opponent through their attempt to disrobe her in front of the court.

aspects of life, women on the whole god fearing, tend to accept the role of preserver of culture and tradition imposed on them, ideally insulating them against concern with material and social deprivations.'[110] Women's stability within the family system is thus connected here with 'patriarchal dividends' and agency that can be derived also from their religiosity, which they are charged to uphold and re-imbibe in their children through their mothering function.[111] Importantly, the texts' representations of women's religiosity evidence not only the mothers' roles as cultural transmitters, but also the protagonists' own ambivalent attitudes towards religion which forms part of the larger narrative of their quest for identity and becomes a possible source for their identification with their mother figures, even as they distance themselves from the older woman's conservative values. The echoes explored previously between the mothers and daughters in these texts thus also encompass this complicated inheritance of religio-cultural ideas.

The protagonists' difficulty of separating themselves from such a Hindu femininity is furthered by the texts' Hindu intertextuality (embedded within the daughters' subjectivity through the texts' daughter-centricity).[112] This intertextuality is most forcefully present in Hariharan's *TFON*, which roots itself strongly in Hindu mythology by contemplating the possibilities of both collusion with and subversion of patriarchal femininities through building a polyphonic chorus relating stories of female subjectivities, both real and mythical.

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[110] Nirad C. Chaudhuri, qtd in Dutta, p. 93.

[111] In *DHNT*, we find that moments of identification between mother and daughter are presented entirely through religious rituals and festivals, which Sarita particularly recalls as the only instances of favour and attention received from her mother (56, 100). In FF, the comfort that protagonist Uma derives from her widowed aunt's attentions are also connected with '[c]urling up…around Mira-masi's comfortable lap' and 'listen[ing] to her relate those ancient myths of Hinduism' (40). *TFON*'s Devi understands her grandmother's mythological stories as 'a prelude to my womanhood' (51).

[112] Deshpande's texts are peppered with references to Hindu mythology, exemplified in *DHNT* opening with Sarita's recollection of the Krishna-Sudama fable from the *Bhagavata Purana*, through which she locates her return to the household within an established Hindu narrative of estrangement and reunion between individuals who are unequally positioned in society. Batty has noted how this mythological density in Deshpande's works has contributed to their appraisal as 'local', 'parochial', 'vernacular' or 'identitarian', and reads such a reception as the primary reason for the relatively shadowed position of Deshpande's oeuvre in the international literary circuit. Batty, p. xxx. Desai's relatively more cosmopolitan texts instead establish their protagonists' Hinduness through their juxtaposition with other (Muslim or Christian) femininities.

Whether these mythological women function within the texts as possible sources of inspiration and strength, or as prototypes against which to define oneself, their presence helps us acknowledge the particularly Hindu ethos that permeates the texts. The pejorative connotations of the mother characters' religiosity placed in contrast with the more insidious suffusion of the protagonists' narratives within the same religious ethos thus present the strongest connection with contemporaneous feminist contemplations of female agency, specifically in the possible correlations to events such as the Ramjanmabhoomi debate (explained in Chapter 2), and the feminist movement's discomfort with growing Hindutva sentiment, arising simultaneously at the time of the texts' writing and publication.

The pejorative implications of women's religiosity in these texts, symbolised as we have seen in the peripheral mother characters, can be read as echoing the feminist movement's discomfort and disillusionment because of the co-option of feminist imperatives by right-wing factions, demonstrated in Radha Kumar's recording that right-wing political parties such as the Shiv Sena 'formed a women's wing whose primary activity was anti-Muslim propaganda,' and 'feminist discourse was used to propagate a cult of widow immolation from 1982-83' which demanded 'women's "right" to commit sati.'[113] Such instances obliged the movement to recognise its liberalist assumption that a woman's agency and freedom '*must* be the consequences of her "own will" rather than of custom, tradition, or social coercion,' and to its consequent acknowledgement of women's intersectional locations which would allow their agency to be employed to buttress patriarchally sanctioned narratives of femininity, especially in relation to religion.[114]

The texts, through the mother characters' agency, offer this awareness that 'socially authorized forms of [religious] performance,' as well as the past and its traditions, can often

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[113] Radha Kumar, pp. 158–59.
[114] Mahmood, p. 11.

function as 'the potentialities […] through which the self is realized,' while also echoing the feminist movement's discontent with this recognition through imbuing it within the negatively defined mother character, rather than the protagonist.[115] My reading of the protagonist's own interpellation within the dominant cultural mode can also be associated with the feminist movement and its recognition of its 'unconscious majority [Hindu] communal assumptions.'[116] This infusion of a Hindu ethos, within the feminist movement as well as the protagonist and her text, reflects an anxiety for authenticity in the face of accusations of being 'westernized, upper-class and urban, and therefore ignorant of, and unsympathetic to, traditional 'Indian' society'.[117] The protagonists' return to the natal home echoes the allegorical return of the feminist movement to its 'roots' in the 1980s through 'the attempt to reappropriate traditionally accepted women's spaces [and] reinterpret myths, epics and folktales.'[118] This anxiety and 'rooting' in tradition seen in the texts presents how bourgeois feminist fiction as a genre faces similar allegations of rootlessness and therefore embeds itself with a Hinduness that can be 'employed to press home the idea of Indianness' in the novels.[119]

An analysis of these texts' representations of women's religious agency, and its differential treatment of the Hinduness of the protagonist as opposed to that of her mother, thus allows us to argue for their embeddedness within their sociohistorical context that featured the same debates around women's relationship to religio-cultural structures, and the possibilities for female agency that lie therein.

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[115] Mahmood, pp. 31, 115.
[116] Dietrich, pp. 39–40.
[117] Radha Kumar, p. 159.
[118] Radha Kumar, p. 145.
[119] Deshpande, *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays*, p. 44. Deshpande interestingly notes here that Hindu mythological intertextuality is used in these texts as ''a kind of code, a short-cut [that can] convey a great number of things to readers who are familiar with these stories,' indicating therefore the texts' interpellation of a specifically Hindu reader.

Conclusion

Through its analysis of five 'bourgeois feminist' texts, three of which were published in the 1980s and two in the 1990s, this chapter has attempted to argue that the representation of peripheral mother characters and the forms of agency they are allowed to enact follows surprisingly consistent patterns that help us theorise the texts' connections to contextual debates on female agency.[120] The first section's focus on the broader discursive affiliations of both the mother and her daughter, whose fraught relationship takes centre-stage in these texts, has allowed us to discern the authors' depiction of women's intersectional identities that encompass both their collusions with and resistances to varied ideologies, so that their individual culpability for being 'bad' mothers is diffused and their agency is instead defined in the fact of their negotiation between these discourses. The second section's focus upon the texts' representations of not only surrogate mothering but also madness and religion has highlighted these arenas as more spaces within which women are able to undertake positions of power, dominance or agency while still adhering to the boundaries of a hegemonic patriarchal discourse. The final section, on religious agency, was able to pick at the ambivalences within the text towards women's relationship with religion and draw multiple parallels to a similar reckoning within the Indian feminist movement during the 1980s and 1990s. Through these different strands, the chapter has attempted to demonstrate the ways in which these texts embed the concerns of bourgeois women attempting to navigate the frameworks of liberalisation and globalisation and the attendant introduction of new value

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[120] While these texts can and have been grouped together because of these similarities and the proximity in their publication dates, the argument here conscientiously stops short of claiming a rigid linearity in the representation of peripheral mother characters across the decades. The problems with imposing such linearity are evident in the fact that Desai's two Mira characters, who are noted as showcasing many similarities, are portrayed in novels that were published almost twenty years apart. Additionally, the texts Desai published between 1980 and 1999 do not present similar peripheral mother or mother surrogate figures, indicating thus an almost complete break in such representation. One of these intermediary texts, *In Custody* (1984), which engages directly with Hindu-Muslim conflict through the lens of a male protagonist, will be explored further in Chapter 5.

systems and new possibilities for female agency, alongside a deep anxiety around maintaining a rooted 'Indian' identity, within the mother-daughter relationship by relying on its capacity to depict such shifts through the thematic of a 'generation gap'.[121]

The next chapter focuses instead upon moments of identification between mother and daughter that are taken even further than the relatively uncomfortable mirroring expressed in the texts analysed here, by examining notions of polyphony and the peripheral mother's self-expression in the bourgeois feminist novel of the 1990s. These texts, as we shall see, emphasise the daughter's recognition of her mother's daughterliness so that she moves away from the urge to 'mythologize the figure of the mother' and allows therefore for a contemplation of the possibilities of intergenerational solidarities through more easily accepting the necessarily complex negotiations that constitute female agencies, resistances and subjectivities.[122] In fact, as Steph Lawler notes, such an integration of the motherly and daughterly selves in itself can present a form of resistance, 'because patriarchal attitudes have encouraged us to split, to polarize, these images, and to project all unwanted guilt, anger, shame, power, freedom, onto the "other" woman.'[123] Such resistant solidarity and empathy is embodied in the protagonist's actively seeking a sense of identity through her maternal heritage (as opposed to the negative identification observed in the texts in this chapter), thus formulating the maternal as nostalgia.

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[121] It must be noted that the texts' concerns with the newfound possibilities for female agency in the public sphere are rooted in their bourgeois milieu, since it is upper class women who find their way into public forms of work in this period through liberalisation, while women of other classes and castes have been continuously engaged in such work out of necessity long before this decade. These implications of caste and class in relation to ideas of public and private will be explored further in Chapter 5.

[122] Davis, p. 521.

[123] Lawler, p. 253.

Chapter 4

Mother as Nostalgia

'[W]e think back through our mothers if we are women'[1] – Virginia Woolf

Introduction

The previous chapter has been concerned with the study of maternal figures in the bourgeois feminist text who are bound within the functions of 'bad mother' or 'surrogate mother', and the manners in which these characters inhabit an ambivalent space marked by resistance and complicity, through which positionalities they are able to highlight the complexity of female agency. In reading these representations of maternal figures as foils to their daughters, the chapter also highlighted the particular attitudes towards such complex female agency within the 'bourgeois feminist' oeuvre of the 1980s. Such focus on the maternal figure at the periphery of the text allowed for a lateral reading of the oeuvre's understanding of female agency that encompasses a broader range and complexity than traditional definitions of 'the feminist' which might not account for everyday forms of resistance.

In this chapter, the focus remains upon the maternal figure who metamorphises from her foil function to a 'roots' function, where the daughter chooses to *identify* (rather than disidentify, as in the texts analysed in the previous chapter) with the mother figure, and to draw a sense of self, identity and ancestry from her. This helps us arrive at the second central function of the mother character in the bourgeois feminist text – the maternal as nostalgic presence. The previous chapter has, in fact, already addressed this function in noting the cultural contexts that the mother character is burdened with providing to the narrative that

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[1] Woolf, p. 76.

allow her to be particularly associated with religion. While the mother's cultural function holds pejorative connotations in texts with fraught mother-daughter relationships, this chapter highlights texts in which the daughter and her text actively seek and celebrate this maternal inheritance. In doing so, the texts analysed here provide for agentic possibilities through the act of narration or storytelling within the framework of matrilineal inheritance and intergenerational solidarity. The daughter-protagonist's ambivalence towards the mother figure's agency that was noted in the previous chapter is replaced here by a search for this inheritance and a vocalising of past female experience that validates the daughter-protagonist's own attempts at subject-formation and negotiation with patriarchal hegemony. The analysis in this chapter thus continues the thesis's focus on the shifts in mother-daughter relations as synecdochic for the relationship between a feminist contingent and the women who necessitate a re-examination of feminist ideas of agency and resistance. If the mother-daughter relationship in chapter 3 emphasised forms of alienation and difference, the movement towards understanding and solidarity beyond ideological difference in this chapter highlights attempts by feminists to broaden the boundaries of feminism itself to accommodate the various negotiations undertaken by women when positioned within a framework of hegemonic discourses, from cultural and religious affiliations to political loyalties.

This focus on the maternal as nostalgic and the possibilities of agency embedded within it also continues to emphasise the forms of ambivalence and negotiation that this thesis is concerned with highlighting, rather than any simplistic escape from patriarchal societal constructions or any rudimentary representation of mother characters as being either passive or resistant. This nostalgic function can, as noted in the previous chapter, position the mother as a mouthpiece for patriarchy where it becomes a method of initiation for the younger woman into a hegemonic (Hindu) discourse of womanhood and remains a restricted

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avenue within which mother-daughter bonding is possible. Simultaneously, a nostalgic narrative presents the possibility of passing down a complex history of female identity and agency that empowers the daughter-protagonist, but there still persists a danger of reducing the mother to a cultural mouthpiece in service of her daughter's identity formation. Finally, the formation of nostalgic matriliny can also be presented as a form of co-authorship and feminist praxis, in which the mother and daughter arrive at a form of effective strategic essentialism that acknowledges their intersectionalities, but does not allow the fissures in their cultural and political loyalties, or their perspectives on female resistance, to preclude possible solidarities.

All these varied formulations of the maternal as nostalgic depicted in these texts are affected in particular by the forms of narration each novel undertakes. In order to accommodate the mother's cultural narration, the texts must expand beyond a narrow first-person representation of the world through the daughter's eyes and find ways to incorporate dissenting voices. This chapter thus examines the texts' movement towards polyphony and the space created for representing more complex female agencies. Studying the function of the mother within the bourgeois feminist text allows the text's representation of 'resistance' to be recalibrated, shifting away from the protagonist and her inhabiting of private and public spaces, in order to engage in a more complex conversation surrounding the canvas of possibilities created for different women based on their positionalities, in both the public and private realm. This once more allows for a reading of the ways in which these texts are able to engage with contemporaneous conversations within Indian feminism surrounding intersectionality and female agency.

To investigate these cross-sections of agency, nostalgia, cultural narration and polyphony, this chapter examines four novels (in varying levels of depth), namely Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* (1992) and *A Matter of Time* (1996), Githa Hariharan's *The*

Thousand Faces of Night (1992) and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998).[2] It is

evidently in the context of 1990s India, therefore, that the chapter undertakes a contemplation

of nostalgia and its particular manifestations within a mother-daughter relationship, the

significance of which the following section will explore by studying the cultural, political,

and economic conditions in India during this decade.

Nostalgia in the 1990s

In her investigation of nostalgia as a historical concept, Svetlana Boym notes that its modern

form has a particular connection to the twentieth century and its disillusionment with the

modernity that was heralded at the beginning of the century in its latter half. Boym argues

that nostalgia functions as 'a defense mechanism', even 'a rebellion against the modern idea

of time, the time of history and progress', and points to the fragmentariness incited by

globalisation, urbanisation and cosmopolitanism that causes 'an affective yearning for a

community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity.'[3] Boym's reading of this

modern manifestation of nostalgia as appearing particularly in the 1960s in the Western

context is complicated in other, non-Western contexts by the prevalence of a postcolonial

nostalgia.[4]

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[2] Shashi Deshpande, *The Binding Vine* (Gurgaon: Penguin India, 1993); Shashi Deshpande, *A Matter of Time* (Gurgaon: Penguin India, 1996); Manju Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* (Gurgaon: Penguin India, 1998). All further references to these texts are from these editions and will be made in parenthesis within the body of the chapter. The abbreviations *TBV*, *AMOT* and *DD* will be used for each of these novels respectively.

[3] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), pp. xiv, xv.

[4] It is interesting that Boym does not specify this Western context, instead presenting a generalised statement on the chronologies of nostalgia as a global phenomenon. In fact, the word 'Western' might not reflect correctly on the study either, since these theorisations of nostalgia anticipate the text's study of nostalgic spaces in post-Soviet Russia alongside other post-communist European cities, as well as the USA. However, Boym does not make any reference to colonialism and its significant impact upon the colonising/colonised nation's tendencies for nostalgia. Dennis Walder's introduction on postcolonial nostalgias in his study of the function of memory and nostalgia in the postcolonial works of Naipaul, Adichie, and Lessing is able to address this gap, particularly in its grappling with the intertwined and interdependent nostalgias of the oppressor and the oppressed. Dennis Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation, and Memory*, Routledge Research in Postcolonial Literatures (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

The centrality of history to the tussle between the coloniser and colonised was emphatically underlined by Frantz Fanon in his seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), when he argued that colonialism 'by a kind of perverted logic, […] turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.'[5] The anticolonial endeavour is thus marked by a desire to retrieve an untouched past as well as a mourning of the impossibility of such retrieval, through a nostalgia for precolonial times. The first chapter of this thesis has referred to Uma Chakravarti's work in uncovering an impetus in the nineteenth century to reconstitute a number of elements of Indian society in order to develop a 'Hindu-Aryan identity' that could allow the newly formed middle classes 'to contend with the 'burden' of the present, especially with the loss of self-esteem following the British conquest of India'.[6]

These (anti)colonial origins of Indian nostalgia linger and inform the nature of a new wave of nostalgia that marks the modern Indian psyche when another epistemic shift arrives in the 1990s, in the form of the liberalisation, globalisation, urbanisation, and the attendant fragmentation of 'old' forms of thought and experience. Chapter 2 of this thesis has closely followed the implications of neoliberalism upon Indian society in 1991, through its introduction of 'foreign' values and reconfiguration of ideas of home, culture, and, importantly, women's agency, along with the significant economic changes it effected. This fragmentation and reconfiguration necessitates a revisit to the act of identity-formation that Chakravarti records in the nineteenth century, and a resultant refocusing on history and nostalgia which manifests also in popular culture from this time period. In their article on the new configurations of nation and family in Hindi cinema post-1990, Sheena Malhotra and Tavishi Alagh show the ways in which the genre's previous reformist tendencies, which

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[5] Frantz Fanon, 'On National Culture', in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), pp. 206–48 (p. 210).
[6] Chakravarti, pp. 27–28.

focused upon raising awareness about social ills and inequalities and inspiring change, are replaced in this period by familial or domestic dramas featuring a monolithic idea of 'Indianness' in 'rich, Hindu, and patriarchal' milieus that keep the doors closed upon the radical shifts taking place in the public sphere through economic restructuring, the arrival of new media technologies, and the resurgence of Hindutva as a response to these changes.[7] Films such as *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* (1994), *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), each wildly popular upon release, thus undertake a narrowing of a previously ambiguous and multicultural Indian identity through a 'harking back' with rose-tinted glasses to a previous, simpler time of a Hindu family and its adherence to '*sanskaar*' (tradition).

Rather than encouraging social reform, these films close the doors upon change and instead encourage a collective mourning 'for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values.'[8] Interactions with the outside world, particularly with the Western world, are sanitised in order to adopt its consumption culture that boosts the liberalisation project (visible in the luxurious homes, cars, clothes and jewellery featured in these films), while maintaining Hindu, patriarchal values and heteronormative family systems (evident in the central conflict of these films threatening the dissolution of the Indian family, and their conclusions celebrating its overcoming of such conflict to ensure its immutability in the face of change).[9] Given the Bollywood industry's 'self-positioning as an unofficial ideological apparatus' that reflects the concerns of its audiences, and the particular success of these films,

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[7] Sheena Malhotra and Tavishi Alagh, 'Dreaming the Nation: Domestic Dramas in Hindi Films Post-1990', *South Asian Popular Culture*, 2.1 (2004), 19–37 (pp. 20–21).

[8] Boym, Chp. 1.

[9] Malhotra and Alagh, pp. 26, 29. Malhotra and Alagh also comment on the shifts in the representation of the Indian diaspora in these films, who come to represent this superficial synthesis of Western wealth and Indian values, as visible in the characters played by Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan in both *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* and *Kabhie Khushi Kabhie Gham*. The diasporic origins of Indian nostalgia will be addressed in the following section.

this receding behind the closed doors of the private sphere and into a monolithic 'Indian'

identity can thus be read as a particular symptom of the nostalgic tendencies of 1990s India.[10]

The assurance of the continuity of family in these films, with its burden of history and

tradition, naturally transmogrifies into the genre's particular treatment of its female

characters, who remain central to the stability of both *sanskaar* (tradition) and *parivar*

(family) while projecting a veneer of modernity, as Malhotra and Alagh note in the final

section of their article. In this, the films and the culture they represent clearly echo the

centrality of women's issues in the anticolonial/nationalist project of 'the recovery of

tradition' in the nineteenth and early twentieth century which marks the origin of this

perpetual balancing act between 'modernity' and 'tradition' and has been thoroughly

explored in the first chapter of this thesis. [11] It is this lineage of women's central function to

the nation's various derivations of nostalgia that can be underlined in my reading of the

treatment of mother characters in the texts being studied here, alongside an exploration of

how the mother figure herself is understood as the central source of memory, history, and

identity, not only in India but in a global context.

Mothers in Sepia

In most cultures, Western and non-Western, the mother figure is marked as origin within

biological, historical, psychoanalytic and creative realms, for 'it is by [mother] and through

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[10] Rini Bhattacharya Mehta, 'Bollywood, Nation, Globalization: An Incomplete Introduction', in *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation, and Diaspora*, ed. by Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Rajeshwari V. Pandharipande (London: Anthem Press, 2010), pp. 1–14 (p. 2). The popularity of these films, and their association with ideas of 'traditional' Indian (Hindu) values, is evidenced in their continued presence within popular culture, particularly through the '*sanskaari*' (traditional) memes that began trending on social media in 2013 featuring the actor Alok Nath, who plays a benevolent, traditional patriarch in all three films mentioned above, as well as many others in this decade.

[11] Sangari and Vaid, p. 10. Uma Chakravarti's study of the vedic dasi and Lata Mani's study of the *sati* debate in this collection are of particular importance in understanding the relationship between women and a nationalist nostalgia for a precolonial 'golden' era. For example, Mani notes how the prohibition of *sati* is read by progressive nationalists like Rammohun Roy 'as a return to the Hindu Golden Age' in which women were well-respected and treated as equals (p. 112).

her (*a travers elle*), as a source of memory, that one is rooted in a genealogy.'[12] In psychoanalytic terms, she has been theorised as the basis of all other forms of nostalgia, which are, at their core, a yearning for original oneness with the mother.[13] In cultural terms, she is 'a symbol so powerful that it shapes the dominant structures of Western thought' and 'the ground upon which the world of meaning is constructed.'[14] She is made to represent the very source of identity, since she is 'our first home, the original *safe house* […] by which all later spaces of belonging are measured.'[15]

Wrapped as she is in this mythical language of 'origin', 'authenticity' and 'home', the mother figure easily lends herself to being used as a metaphor for nostalgia, particularly within the context of a child's identity crisis caused by seismic epistemic shifts, within which she figures as a bulwark, firmly representing 'an unbroken continuity of tradition.'[16] Her function as such is particularly visible in diasporic narrations of identity-formation, where the mother stands for the country that has been lost or left behind. In her article on gastro-nostalgia, aptly titled 'As Mother Made It', Tulsi Srinivas observes how food becomes a central source of identity for Indian diasporic communities and how women in NRI (non-resident Indian) families attempt to instil an Indian identity in their children by replicating recipes from their mothers and grandmothers, whose figures help 'authenticate and legitimate

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[12] Guy Dugas, qtd. in Gil Zehava Hochberg, 'Mother, Memory, History: Maternal Genealogies in Gayl Jones' Corregidora and Simone Schwartz-Bart's Pluie et Cent Sur Telumee Miracle', *Research in African Literatures*, 34.2 (2003), 1–12 (p. 1).

[13] James Phillips, 'Distance, Absence, and Nostalgia', in *Descriptions*, ed. by Don Ihde and Hugh Silverman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p. 70.

[14] Lynne Huffer, *Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures: Nostalgia, Ethics, and the Question of Difference* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 7–8. The same could certainly be said about modern Indian thought, as was made evident in the first chapter's exploration of the symbolism of 'the mother' permeating nationalism (Mother India) and religion (Hindu mother goddesses), as well as of the rhetoric of ameliorating conditions for young girls and women because of their present or future function as mothers to the sons of the nation.

[15] Roberta Rubenstein, *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women's Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 160.

[16] Madhu Dubey, 'Gayl Jones and the Matrilineal Metaphor of Tradition', *Signs*, 20.2 (1995), 245–67 (pp. 248–49).

the recipes and food' and provide 'symbolic and affective value' to them.[17] Through her

function of authenticity in the practice of gastro-nostalgia, the mother thus becomes central to

ideas of 'home', as her children attempt to hold on to 'the earliest experience of

mother/home/Paradise, [to] home as womb: prenatal, amniotic bliss,' to develop a sense of

Indianness while contending with the impact upon their identities of the modernised, foreign

landscapes they inhabit.[18] In diasporic communities particularly, emphasis is placed on 'the

symbolic importance of feminized spaces of home' in 'preserving' Indian culture, thus

echoing Partha Chatterjee's theorisation of the private space and its inhabitants being

burdened with this task during the colonial period in India.[19] The diasporic mother figure thus

inhabits a spatial nostalgia (in being confined to this home) as well as a temporal nostalgia (in

being the repository of 'tradition' that she is expected to bequeath to her children).

The literary manifestations of these functions are visible in diasporic texts such as

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* (2005) which focuses upon the challenges

faced by a young Indian-American artist, Rakhi. Klarina Priborkin understands this

protagonist's mother's role (as well as that of all Indian mothers residing in the U.S.A.) as

one of 'passing down the traditions they have inherited from their own mothers in India.'[20]

This task, however, is not understood as a simple expository function within the daughter's

narrative, but is instead burdened with psychoanalytic implications similar to those observed

in the texts studied in the previous chapter. Priborkin argues that the mothers' failure to

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[17] Tulsi Srinivas, '"As Mother Made It": The Cosmopolitan Indian Family, "Authentic" Food Andthe Construction of Cultural Utopia', *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, 32.2 (2006), 191–221 (p. 211). Srinivas particularly studies the ready-to-eat industry's harnessing of the symbol of the mother to represent authenticity, and the ways in which women rely upon this industry in order to elicit the idea of 'home'.

[18] Rubenstein, p. 157. This idea of the homesickness as a longing for a return to the mother's womb, which stands for a lost homeland, is a Freudian construction, as Jane Gallop has noted (*Reading Lacan*, p. 148).

[19] Alison Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 12.

[20] Klarina Priborkin, 'Mother's Dreams, Father's Stories: Family and Identity Construction in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Queen of Dreams', *South Asian Review*, 29.2 (2008), 199–219 (p. 199). The focus remains upon mothers and daughters because it is they who are expected to 'preserve the ways of the old country,' as Sayantani DasGupta and Shamita Das Dasgupta note (qtd. in Priborkin, note 12, p. 217).

perform as cultural transmitters and to 'acknowledg[e] and facilitate[e] the construction of their daughters' bicultural identities' must result in 'deeper, concealed psychological damage', 'hamper the construction of her identity', and even lead to the daughter's own failure as wife and mother.[21] In the particular case of *Queen of Dreams*, Priborkin diagnoses Rakhi's Westernised view of India and her sense of uprootedness as resulting from her mother's reticence.[22] This analysis of a diasporic text thus reaffirms the mother's symbolising of 'home' and 'culture' within her family and community, and threatens dire consequences if the mother fails to live up to these burdensome expectations.[23] Indeed, Divakaruni signifies this sense of burden, and the mother's desire (as well as inability) to separate herself from the daughter/family through the haunting image of her 'bearing [my daughter] within me on and on, a pregnancy without end'.[24]

Divakaruni's mother character embodies a stereotype common not only in diasporic fiction, but in all 'Indo-English novels by women', since, as Geetanjali Chanda argues, 'the main role of the few mothers in this literature seems to be that of transmitters of cultural values.'[25] This prevalence in both home and diasporic fictions can be explained by the similarities in the experiences of cosmopolitanism between urban Indian and diasporic populations. Srinivas' aforementioned study of gastro-nostalgia particularly notes the parallels, arguing that the harnessing of food culture 'for retrieving of a pre-modern self located in earlier caste based and agricultural rhythms' is part of 'the push against the anxiety that modernity and globalization bring', and that this anxiety is reflected 'in Bangalore as in

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[21] Priborkin, pp. 199, 203, 210.

[22] Priborkin's analysis underlines this reticence in the context of how it might protect or 'damage' the daughter, but does not account for the mother's own trauma which she cannot or does not wish to articulate.

[23] Priborkin notes how this burden is a function of the recalibration of the Indian family into a nuclear system, particularly in the diaspora, which results in mothers becoming 'almost exclusive role-models and cultural educators' (212). This observation can also be extrapolated to account for similar burdens upon mothers in cosmopolitan centres in India.

[24] Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Queen of Dreams* (London: Abacus, 2005), p. 234.

[25] Chanda, 'Mapping Motherhood: The Fiction of Anita Desai', p. 73.

Boston.' [26] Thus, urban centres *within* India also become harbours of 'modern', cosmopolitan families at the turn of the millennium and feature a multicultural, transnational milieu within which an individual might feel torn from 'their "home culture"' and rely upon 'the idea of "homeland" [as] an important nucleus for nostalgic sentiment.' [27]

In fact, it is this very sense of loss, homesickness and nostalgia that underlies the conceit of the prodigal daughter, which was observed in the previous chapter as being a peculiarly common feature in the novels studied in these two chapters. In these texts, some daughters return from the urban cities (Bombay in *DHNT* and *R&S*, and Delhi in *DD*) to smaller natal towns and others return from Western countries *to* the urban city (USA to Delhi in *CLOD* and USA to Madras in *TFON*). In this last text, the prodigality goes even further when the (grand)daughter-protagonist returns not only to Madras but then retreats through her memories to a house in the village *agraharam*[28] that is occupied by her grandmother.[29] While *TFON*'s treatment of the mother-daughter relationship and its frictions was commented upon in the previous chapter, its featuring of a grandmother who functions as a sepia-tinted figure of (Hindu) nostalgia is of particular relevance here. Her function in the text allows this chapter to explore, in the context of its broader preoccupation with representations of agency, how the text and its character negotiate between her embalmment within the nostalgia so that she is sapped of agency, and the agency that she *does* enact through her storytelling.

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[26] Srinivas, p. 209. Urbanisation itself being a central feature of neoliberalisation, the advent of such anxiety in these spaces where neoliberal agendas first manifest is thus explicable. The support received by political parties that purport the promotion of more 'traditional' values, such as the BJP, from urban city populations can also be (partly) attributed to such anxiety.

[27] Srinivas, pp. 209, 205. These urban centres are also the location in which the abovementioned 'Indo-English novels' are written, which accounts for the prevalence of the mother's nostalgic function in these texts as much as in diasporic ones.

[28] The direct reference to an *Agraharam* here also addresses, without being explicit, the protagonist's and her family's Brahmin (upper-caste) identities, since the word refers to a village quarter inhabited by Brahmins. The stories that the grandmother tells are thus suffused with caste-based implications too.

[29] Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p. 17. All further references to this text are from this edition and will be made in parenthesis in the body of the chapter. The abbreviation *TFON* will be used for this text.

As the protagonist of this text, Devi, negotiates a treacherous path between New Jersey and Madras, and between the elusively defined monoliths of 'tradition' and 'modernity', this grandmother reaches out from the past to give her a sense of rootedness and identity in a manner similar to the mothers and grandmothers in Tulsi Srinivas' article. A return to the grandmother is an escape from the urban home in Madras and its mottoes of 'order, reason, progress' (mottoes which could apply just as easily to America), and a return to comfort and belonging, to her soft lap, gentle murmurs, and her '*pallav*' (the drape of her sari) which covers the protagonist's face, 'enclosing it, a silken refuge' (26, 18). Her stories from Hindu mythology function for Devi as 'a prelude to my womanhood' (51), thus occupying a central function in identity-formation within the *bildungsroman* and fulfilling the adage that 'a stable identity, personal or national, rests on an awareness of continuity with a beloved past.'.[30] The grandmother character is thus harnessed to provide 'chains of memory, or tradition, [that are] seen as the storage of inherited conceptions, meanings and values essential for the social order' to the daughter-protagonist, which help her navigate the present shifts in her social order by presenting a past collective identity.[31]

Hariharan's employment of this character to make this collective memory relevant and central to the text's and protagonist's present is evident in how the mythological tales are structured within the text. Each tale is employed by the grandmother to answer a question posed by the young child about an event in their own lives (in the present or the recent past). A question about her mother's sacrifice of her veena after marriage is answered by the story of Queen of Hastinapur Gandhari's sacrifice of her sight after marriage (28-29), and her cousin Uma's suffering in an abusive marriage is contextualised by the story of Princess

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[30] Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003), p. 53.
[31] Misztal, p. 5.

Amba's suffering and final revenge against Bheeshma (36-39).[32] In some ways, this grandmother replicates the function of the mothers in the previous chapter as the mouthpiece for patriarchal hegemonic ideals of Indian womanhood, particularly of sacrificial qualities associated with perfect wifehood and motherhood, which become evident in the more ideological and didactic register of the parenthetical interruptions to the mythological stories, where the morals that these stories are intended to imbue in her granddaughter are clarified: 'All husbands are noble' (29); 'it's never their fault, it's always ours' (33) ; 'A woman without a husband has no home' (38).

And yet, Hariharan presents this didacticism with a note of irony and illustrates the radical possibilities of this storytelling in the 'precarious tone of dangerous possibilities' (35) in these tales of resistance which might elicit a similarly radical response in the women who are listening, so that the text taps into 'the liberating potential associated with the maternal ability not only to remember but also to *invent* stories about the past, both the immediate and the mythical, as a way to transcend the horrors of women's daily existence.'[33] The grandmother's tales vacillate between presenting a nostalgic ode to previous iterations of Indian womanhood that implies regression or stasis, and functioning as radical reimaginings of such womanhood when 'her stories reached a frenzied pitch of fantasy' (39), thus emphasising the 'dual potentiality of stories to either reinforce or degrade the boundaries that normally divide seemingly finite social worlds from the infinite variety of possible human

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[32] Both Gandhari and Amba's stories are from the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, and are employed by Hariharan to present the forms of resistance and negotiation undertaken by these mythical women embroiled within a specific patriarchal hegemony, which are then brought to reflect upon the 'real' characters in the text and their own forms of suffering and agency. The significance of Gandhari's loyalty and sacrifice has been explained in a footnote in Chapter 3. The character of Amba similarly denotes female suffering and revenge due to her kidnapping by the warrior Bheeshma who wishes her to marry his brother. While Amba's sisters Amba and Ambalika (kidnapped alongside her) accept their fate, Amba resists acquiescing to the patriarchal injunction and returns to her lover in hopes of marrying him. He rejects Amba while casting suspicions upon her purity, leading Amba to swear revenge upon Bheeshma, which she achieves in her reborn form as Shikhandi.

[33] Hochberg, p. 6. This liberatory potential is made visible in the text by the stark contrasting of the grandmother's fanciful tales with those narrated by the protagonist's father-in-law, a Sanskrit scholar, whose stories emphasise 'limits' and 'tradition' (51).

experience.'[34] Like the women in the stories she narrates, then, the grandmother occupies an ambivalent, negotiating position within the daughter-protagonist's narrative as she presents the possibilities for female storytelling to create mouthpieces for patriarchy (creating a desire in Devi to 'live up to her illustrious ancestors' (27)) or invokers of resistance (allowing Devi to write herself into a mythology of 'a woman warrior, a heroine' (41)), both of which provide forms of enunciation and agency to the women undertaking such narration and a sense of affirmation and identity to the daughters who are listening. In both her collusive and resistant capacities, however, her presence is strongly suffused with the mythology she is tasked with reciting, so that her storytelling is entirely restricted to this recitation and does not allow the space for her own subjectivity. In fact, in telling her stories, the grandmother herself transforms into something mythical and steeped in nostalgic traditionalism.

The grandmother's own figure becoming tinted by the very tones of sepia that she bestows upon the text can be understood in the context of her role in the text as the repository of collective memory. In her study of social remembering, Barbara Misztal notes how '[t]he emergence of the bourgeoisie and the modern capitalist economy' and the resultant 'decline of the extended, multi-generational family' lead to 'the destruction of a social framework that ensured the transmission of collective memories from one generation to the next.'[35] The grandmother is thus employed in the narrative to hark back to a form of collective cultural memory that is being disrupted by the forces of globalisation in the text and protagonist's present. In marking a modern feminist narrative with traces of the ideologies of womanhood that were central to the construction of a (Hindu) female identity in the past, Hariharan is addressing this sense of loss of a collective memory and the anxiety it produces of a loss of identity and belonging. Here, then, 'the collective frameworks of memory appear as

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[34] Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Variations on a Theme by Hannah Arendt*, 2nd edn (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013), p. 43.

[35] Misztal, pp. 19, 46.

safeguards in the stream of modernity and mediate between the present and the past, between self and other.'[36] It is the grandmother who embodies such safeguards and represents an idolised, mythologised past for the protagonist and her text, and she is therefore placed in a particular milieu, in the *agraharam* with its old ways and rituals, which include minute details such as a refusal to wear a blouse under one's sari because it is 'modern nonsense' (25), and of course, in 'her caressing gnarled fingers and her stories of golden splendour' (27). Thus, as she fulfils her role as 'a valuable source of […] memory', she herself becomes 'forcefully "kept in the past," located outside of history.'[37] In her speech, she comes to represent a specific chronotope, that is a time and space within which a specific 'speech-genre' can be created and voiced, so that she does not speak but in the register of myth.[38] Every question about the adversities faced by real women, as noted above, is answered only through myth, and being restricted to this register allows the grandmother to become part of that same myth. This grandmother's role in the text thus showcases that even a celebration of 'the importance of women's oral tradition, women's alternative knowledge and discourse (parole), risks re-imposing the burden of remembering ("real memory") on women who are thus demanded (directly or less so) to subordinate their story (and present) to the story (and past) of "their people"'.[39]

In her study of the maternal function in nostalgia, Lynne Huffer notes that, '[b]ecause nostalgia requires the construction of a blank space, a lost origin to be rediscovered and

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[36] Boym, Chp. 5.

[37] Hochberg, p. 1.

[38] The concepts of chronotope and speech-genre are part of Mikhail Bakhtin's theorisation of polyphony and dialogism in the novel. Bakhtin theorises speech-genres as a specific assemblage of utterances that inhabit certain zones of a language and are associated with certain social systems and ideologies. Bakhtin's concept of polyphony within the novel is useful for our analysis here because it presents an alternative to the daughter-centricity visible in the previous texts, while also providing the theoretical structure to discern the various roles played by specific maternal characters in the text by analysing the linguistic constructions assigned to them by the text. It also highlights the radical potential of the technique of storytelling employed by these authors, both in the text's writing and the narrating agency provided to the maternal character, thus allowing us to analyse a different form of female agency visible in these novels.

[39] Hochberg, p. 9.

claimed, it necessarily produces a dynamic of inequality in the opposition between a desiring subject and an invisible other.'[40] As she begins to narrate her own story, Devi presents her grandmother as such a 'blank space' or canvas: 'Perhaps I put the oracular, paradoxical words into her generous, buck-toothed mouth each time I recall the fables of childhood' (Prelude). The grandmother's stories and her own figure are reconstructed for the purposes of Devi's identity-formation in a way that 'replicate[s] the child-centered bias of traditional psychoanalysis' and 'den[ies] her her own specificity and agency'[41] In *TFON*, we thus find the (grand)mother created as an empty signifier who comes to represent the culture, tradition, and nation to which the prodigal daughter is returning; nostalgia renders the mother passive.[42] While there is an indication of polyphony in the text's celebration of the chorus of female voices speaking to and through Devi, women like the grandmother and the family retainer Mayamma are employed solely in the daughter-protagonist's project of searching for her identity and are therefore unable to find a location within the text where they can wholly articulate their own subjectivity.[43]

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[40] Huffer, p. 19.

[41] Katharine Ann Jensen, 'Mirrors, Marriage, and Nostalgia: Mother-Daughter Relations in Writings by Isabelle de Charriere and Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 19.2 (2000), 285–313 (p. 289).

[42] Additionally, critics Chanda, Ho and Mathati argue that the text's use of 'a Hindu-Indian framework of stories' particularly enforces 'a deterministic reading of the mother as mother-country.' Geetanjali Singh Chanda, Elaine Yee Lin Ho, and Kavita Mathai, 'Women in "India": Four Recent Novels', *Wasafiri*, 13.26 (1997), 58–62 (pp. 59–60).

[43] The 'old family retainer', Mayamma, replaces the grandmother in the second half of the narration as the protagonist's primary source of mythology, alongside the father-in-law. Mayamma's congealment into myth in a manner similar to the grandmother can also be traced within the text, as she is described sitting in the prayer room, drawing Devi in, as the gods 'loosen her tongue, and she weaves hoarse-voiced fragments of the past' (79). While a chapter in the third part of the novel is narrated from Mayamma's perspective, the register in this section is not only mythical but borders on magical realism, in its interweaving of history, myth, ritual and superstition, the vividness (even baseness) of its imagery, and its unnatural dialogue. This 'othering' of Mayamma and her story also has particular class connotations, and elicits the question of how the realities of non-bourgeois women transmute into myth when an attempt is made to translate them into a language that is alien to their experiences. The unacknowledged presence of class hierarchies in these bourgeois novels will be examined more closely in the next chapter.

In exploring the mother's role within nostalgia so far, whether in popular culture or in literary texts, the concept of nostalgia itself has clearly been read as 'the expression of a regressive wish to retreat to a less complicated moment in history or personal experience' in its desire to retrench patriarchal, caste-based, family systems, of which the mother remains the locus.[44] However, this unequivocal desire for return is often complicated for the daughter by the traumas embedded in the space she is returning to. As seen in the previous chapter, the very maternal figure at the centre of most iterations of nostalgia is also 'often responsible for abuse that is concealed within the home' so that 'the home is a locus of violence from which the girls try to escape.' It thus becomes evident that, 'while nostalgia means homesickness, the home that resides at the centre of this longing or remembering does not necessarily have to adhere to these idealizations' and is in fact often constructed in its idealised form through 'the repeated exclusion of stories that deviate from the domestic ideal, and […] the silencing of female voices.'[45] It is this uncomfortable aspect of nostalgia that was explored in the previous chapter, the discomfort of which was read as manifesting in the disidentification of the daughter with her sepia-tinted mother, as she tried to understand the ambivalence which caused her 'to publicly reject [home] as *unheimlich* (monstrous, spooky) while secretly (*Heimlich*) nursing a longing to return.'[46]

This ambivalence in the daughter's relationship with home can be further elucidated by the shifts caused in attitudes towards home and nostalgia by the introduction of a feminist discourse. In their study of the relationship between feminism and nostalgia in an American context, Janice Doane and Devon Hodges argued that the advent of the women's movement led to a particularly regressive, misogynistic nostalgic discourse in the 1970s and 1980s,

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[44] Rubenstein, p. 3.

[45] Heather A. Hillsburg, 'Reading Nostalgia, Anger, and the Home in Joyce Carol Oates' Foxfire', *Bearing Witness: Joyce Carol Oates Studies*, 1.2 (2014), 1–15 (p. 10).

[46] Angelika Bammer, qtd. in Sinead McDermott, 'Memory, Nostalgia and Gender in A Thousand Acres', *Signs*, 28.1 (2002), 389–407 (p. 392).

promoted by male novelists, theorists and cultural critics, that lamented the present moment's 'degeneracy' and expressed a desire to return to 'a past in which women "naturally" function in the home to provide a haven of stability that is linguistic as well as psychic.'[47] With the alignment of both home and nostalgia with this thematic of regression and oppression in a feminist discourse, coupled also with the 'tension at the heart of feminist consciousness' between 'autonomy' and 'interdependence', a feminist daughter's longing for home becomes 'a yearning for […] a nurturing, unconditionally accepting place/space that has been repressed in contemporary feminism,' that might not exist (or never existed at all) in the home she left behind.[48]

This melancholia in the recognition of the impossibility of return is in itself a feature of a particular form of nostalgia, categorised by Svetlana Boym as 'reflective nostalgia' which 'lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time' and is placed in opposition to a 'restorative nostalgia' that attempts to reclaim a past that 'is not supposed to reveal any signs of decay; it has to be freshly painted in its "original image" and remain eternally young' (as seen in the 'regressive' form of nostalgia explored thus far).[49] For the daughter-protagonists of these novels, the past and its embodiment in home and mother often represent forms of trauma that they do not wish to reinstate, thus leading them to wallow in an ambivalent longing for the past that is less about a return to it, and more about the resistance such nostalgia is able to provide against the imposition of a modern teleology of progress in a globalised urban space. Nostalgia is thus recuperated from its patriarchal affiliations to function as a form of escape from both

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[47] Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, *Nostalgia and Sexual Difference: The Resistance to Contemporary Feminism*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 14. This text was originally published in 1987.
[48] Rubenstein, p. 4.
[49] Boym, Chp. 4; 5.

'tradition' and 'modernity' by allowing for a state of liminality.[50] This recuperation indicates the possibilities for nostalgia to function 'as a politically valid strategy rather than [being] dismissed as simply escapist,' and it has indeed been a central strategy within a global feminist project focused on memory.[51] As Gayle Greene argues, feminism itself can be defined as 'a re-membering, a re-assembling of our lost past and lost parts of ourselves. We search for our mother's gardens […] we search for our mothers – and this search figures prominently in contemporary women's fiction.'[52]

The next sections of this chapter thus read novels by Indian female authors like Deshpande, Hariharan and Kapur as participating in such a global canon formation in the late twentieth century[53] by representing women who go in search of their mothers, and by marking nostalgia as a central conduit for forms of female solidarity that resist the 'uneasy collectivity' identified in the previous chapter as a prominent feature of female-female and mother-daughter relationships in patriarchal familial systems. They undertake this project of nostalgia with an aim to simultaneously prevent the elision of the fissures and gaps within the locations of the mother and daughter, since a reflective nostalgia is able to acknowledge the

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[50] Such a liminal position between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' manifests more in the realm of affect than in the material present where daughter-protagonists might be required to negotiate more directly with the discourses that pull upon them. The limitation of nostalgia to the world of affect and memory perhaps explains the limbo created in most texts where the daughter-protagonist recedes from the modern 'real' world to ruminate upon her *bildungsroman* (or that of another), thus placing memory and its role in identity formation at the forefront of her narration. It is another instance in which *not*-doing and stasis present a form of resistance to the necessity of choice or negotiation, that is, action, which is placed in stark contrast to the *doing* required in the texts from the 2000s (examined in the next chapter) where the protagonist is swept into events in the 'real' world.

[51] McDermott, p. 389.

[52] Gayle Greene, 'Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory', *Signs*, 16.2 (1991), 290–321 (p. 300).

[53] In her anthology of women's fiction that features mothers and daughters, Heather Ingman notes that there was 'an explosion of feminist writing on mother-daughter relationships in the late 1970s and 80s' (p. 18) resulting from the publication of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976), in which Rich argued that '[u]ntil a strong line of love, confirmation and example stretches from mother to daughter, from woman to woman across the generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness' (p. 246). Ingman records a resultant shift in the final decades of the twentieth century in the understanding of female creativity where, 'instead of writing being something to be done in spite of and against the mother, the mother becomes, as in the work of Irigaray and Cixous, implicated in the creative act' (pp. 25-26). Mothers, creativity, and nostalgia thus become intricately linked within a feminist creative manifesto. Heather Ingman, 'Introduction', in *Mothers and Daughters in Twentieth Century: A Literarary Anthology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 1–42; Rich.

imperfections of the past and does not attempt to envelop its subject within mystical tones of sepia.

In Search of the Mother

As Gayle Greene makes evident in the above quotation, a central feature of a feminist form of nostalgia has been the retrieval of lost or suppressed female voices from the past, and this remains an important tool within the novels being studied here as they attempt to develop matrilineal narratives in the context of 1990s India. While critical work on these texts has often underlined the centrality of female subjectivity and commented upon aspects of the mother-daughter relationship, it has not traced a shift in this canon of texts from daughter-centricity to matriliny and polyphony. It has not drawn parallels to a broader (global feminist) agenda of the recovery of the mother[54] and a more local feminist impetus to urgently develop a manifesto of intersectionality to address the newly visible fractures brought about by the advent of Hindutva and economic neoliberalism. This critical necessity for a theory of intersectionality was expounded by theorists who focused on the convoluted meanings of female agency in these contexts and the methods of creating a movement that might allow women to unite in resistance to patriarchy *in spite* of their differences, rather than trying to elide them.[55] This chapter thus suggests that each of these texts endeavours to present a

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[54] As mentioned in the previous chapters, the focus on the theme of motherhood in Indian feminist criticism has primarily uncovered the mother's co-option into narratives of nation, religion and patriotism where she is reduced to an empty signifier in the (male) child's narrative. The critical work on matrilineal narratives, and their particular relevance to the subjectivity and agency of the mother figure, that is being used in this chapter's analysis have therefore been extracted from Western feminist perspectives. The echoes of this Western study of the mother, noted above as originating in the late 70s, can arguably be found in Indian women's fiction and critical work in the 90s, just as parallels might be drawn between the more generic claim that the 1980s and 1990s were 'decades preoccupied with the discourse of memory' and its evidence visible in the critical work undertaken in Indian history, sociology and anthropology in this period to develop an Indian historiography and excavate the politics of memory in India, many of which (including Sangari and Vaid's *Recasting Women* (1989), Radha Kumar's *The History of Doing* (1993), and the work of the Subaltern Studies Group) have been referenced in this thesis. McDermott, p. 389.

[55] The ideas of these theorists in the fields of literature, history and sociology have been thoroughly explored in Chapters 1 and 2, with particular attention to the recalibration of ideas of female agency and feminist intersectionality in the context of women's participation in Hindutva and the shifts in ideas of 'public' and

polyphony that can be read as an attempt to encompass such intersectionality which comes to replace the grudging disidentification that was previously visible between mother and daughter characters in bourgeois feminist fiction. If the previous chapter attempted to read agency and resistance in the mothers' *disappointing* villainous actions or failures (from the daughter-protagonist's perspective), this chapter reads their agency and resistance through the text/daughter-protagonist's own retrieval of this mother as a (relatively) complex subjectivity within a matrilineal narrative.

This section of the chapter explores the manifestation of the trope of the 'search for our mother's gardens' in Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine*. It attempts to showcase the forms of agency, intersectional solidarity and complex subjectivity that the text bestows upon the mother characters. In doing so, it is able to highlight the ways in which the novel reconfigures previously fraught female-female relationships by celebrating the resistances of this older generation of women to whom a daughter-protagonist might turn to uncover her own inheritances and retrieve a suppressed voice as she navigates her urban milieu and her own positionalities as daughter, wife and mother, thus contemplating the text's investment in a feminist nostalgia. It also addresses, conversely, the troubling complications presented by this search for the mother and the fissures it might attempt to conceal or deemphasise.

The Binding Vine

In her essay delineating her personal journey of fiction-writing, Shashi Deshpande presents her first six novels as neatly organised into trilogies that also conveniently span a decade each in terms of their publication dates (the 1980s and the 1990s).[56] *The Binding Vine* (1992) features in the second of these trilogies which is marked by a particular shift in focus from

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'private' resulting from women's accelerated participation in the workforce after the introduction of economic neoliberalism.

[56] Deshpande, 'In First Person', pp. 19–20.

the central character (through daughter-centricity) in the first trilogy, to the characters

inhabiting the peripheries in the second. Deshpande herself notes that in this particular text, it

was not the protagonist Urmi and her present grief from having lost her 1-year old daughter

to meningitis or her attempts to help a sexual assault survivor, Kalpana, that were central to

the formulation of the narration, but Urmi's long-dead mother-in-law Mira who 'became for

[her] the most important person in the novel, holding the different characters, the different

strands together.'[57] Deshpande represents Mira as a complex figure who resists categorisation

within a specific role in the patriarchal family, as her narration is undertaken, not through the

protagonist's memories as in the previous texts, but through her journals, poetry and

photographs which are discovered by our protagonist Urmi and are found to document her

experiences of adolescence and early adulthood and her particularly traumatic relationship

with her husband that is marked by marital rape. This focus upon Mira and her first-person

consciousness interjecting and weaving through the protagonist's own allows Mira to insert

an element (albeit rudimentary) of polyphony in the text and importantly, to disrupt her

othering that might have been dictated by her position as a 'mother-in-law.'[58] Urmi's

function in retrieving this lost or suppressed voice through the discovery of journals also

allows for the text to be understood as 'dealing with […] the reconstruction of women's lives

through writing,' thus presenting an impetus for feminist nostalgia or the retrieval of a

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[57] Deshpande, *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays*, pp. 20, 22. The storyline for Kalpana, who lies comatose in hospital for the entire narration, was inspired by the Aruna Shanbaug case of 1973, when Shanbaug was assaulted by a ward boy in the hospital where she worked as a nurse, leading her to remain in a vegetative state for 37 years until her death in 2015. Deshpande notes that this is the 'first and perhaps only time in my life, a novel came out of a real incident, a real woman' (*Writing from the Margin*, 20). This first direct engagement with the 'real' world will be particularly relevant to the discussion about Deshpande and other authors' navigation of the domains of 'public' and 'private', and 'real' and 'fictional,' in the next and final chapter of the thesis.

[58] In his influential work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin defines polyphony as 'a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness' that are not restricted within 'a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness' (p. 6). In the context of our analysis, we find these novels textured with multiple women's experiences that present conflicting possibilities for and interpretations of agency. Mikhail Bakhtin, 'On Dialogism and Heteroglossia (the Other(s)' Word)', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).

matrilineage of both suffering and resistance and contributing to the traditions of feminist memory noted above.[59]

A number of differences can be observed in the politics of centre and periphery, and its impact on the relationships women have with each other, between this text and those analysed in the previous chapter. In particular, *TBV* showcases similarities to *DHNT*, in its thematic focus upon the loss of a child and marital rape. However, it tackles these same issues through a shifted lens. While *DHNT* presented the grieving mother through the perspective of the daughter-protagonist and focused its attention largely upon the consequences of the loss for this daughter/sister through the soured relationship with the mother, *TBV* instead presents the subjectivity of the grieving mother *herself* and her navigation of the changed relationship with her remaining child Kartik (this time a son, with the daughter being lost). Deshpande's poignant representation the complexity of this grief as Urmi tries 'to disentangle Kartik from the child who was part of the Kartik-and-Anu duo' (68) paints a strong contrast to the representation of Ai's grief at losing *her* youngest child in *DHNT* which was marked instead by a focus upon her failure to mother the remaining child and its psychoanalytic implications for this child.

Even in the figure of the protagonist as mother, this strong attachment to one's children rather than a fear of one's motherhood and its capacity to pass on trauma marks a shift from the mother-protagonists Saru (*DHNT*) and Jaya (*TLS*) of Deshpande's first trilogy. While Deshpande herself understands *TBV* as 'a novel about mothers and daughters' (a description we might as easily apply to all the other texts studied in this thesis, even though the theme might not be as foregrounded in them), this text is differentiated by the protagonist's *not* escaping her motherhood to inhabit the position of the daughter, and instead ruminating upon her motherly role and coming to terms with her painful loss through the

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[59] Amrita Bhalla, p. 50.

memories of her daughter which are punctuate the text and periodically incapacitate Urmi.[60] In this text, it is in fact the daughters who are silenced, with Urmi's infant daughter dying and Kalpana lying in a coma, while their mothers navigate their loss as they contemplate the ideology of motherhood ('they brainwash us into this motherhood thing. They make it seem so mystical and emotional when the truth is it's all just a myth' (76)), their lived experience of both its joys and anxieties, and the sudden foreclosure of their development as the mothers of daughters when the daughter is separated from them by the traumatic event. The text thus presents hitherto unexplored forms of female subjectivity and solidarity within this form of fiction simply by preventing the protagonist's return to a daughterliness.[61] Her manner of escape from her grief is marked, rather, by her investment in the stories of other women like Mira and Kalpana, and her attempts to prevent their stories of trauma from being silenced.

In its representation of marital rape too, the text presents a shifted lens. Amrita Bhalla records that in *TBV*, Deshpande 'wished to pursue again the notion of the sexual domination of women's bodies.'[62] However, while *DHNT*'s Sarita and *TBV*'s Mira are both survivors of marital rape, they inhabit not only different texts, but also different social and temporal contexts, particularly through Mira's position as the protagonist's mother-in-law, a figure that is infused with connotations of villainy within Indian popular culture. The notoriety of the mother-in-law figure on Indian television was noted in the previous chapter as a decades-long feature, particularly in serials that focus on the Indian joint family and inevitably present a

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[60] Shashi Deshpande, qtd. in Amrita Bhalla, p. 50.

[61] This is not to suggest that the subjectivity of mothers or grandmothers had never been addressed in Indian women's fiction in English. Many examples of such texts are visible both before and after the 1990s, such as Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) and *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) which present a pregnant mother and a grandmother respectively as their protagonists, and even Deshpande's own later novel, *Moving On* (2004) which features her oldest protagonist, 40-year old Manjari, who is also a mother. As critics such as Radha Chakravarty and Geetha Ramanathan have noted, however, Desai's texts feature the (grand)mother-protagonist's explicit rejection of her motherly function, and Deshpande's protagonist follows the path of the prodigal daughter just like many of the other protagonists, returning to her natal home to read her father's diaries, reminisce about her now-dead family members, and thus to inhabit her daughterliness.

[62] Amrita Bhalla, p. 50.

central conflict between the *saas* (mother-in-law) and *bahu* (daughter-in-law), that continues to be visible in recent TV series as well. This trope echoes the very real conflicts within the 'uneasy collectivity' of women inhabiting the kitchen of a joint Indian family home that have been recorded by many sociologists.[63]

In their study of the continued prevalence of mothers-in-law abusing their daughters-in-law, Ragavan and Iyengar note the widespread acceptance of a mother-in-law's dominance over her daughters-in-law as well as the maternal function assigned to the mother-in-law which allows her the same, if not more, control over the daughter (in-law) as the woman's own mother, particularly in enforcing patriarchal formulations of 'good' wifehood and motherhood. In these iterations, the *saas-bahu* divide comes to represent the intersectionality of women's identities as well as the instability of the category of 'woman' since it 'may be seen as [a] consequence of the different locations women occupy on multiple social hierarchies,'[64] within which is visible the 'culturally specific form of 'patriarchal bargain' between the mother-in-law and the extended household.'[65] It also marks the perpetuation of such an 'uneasy collectivity' since, while the daughter-in-law is stripped of any social or economic power in this role, 'the deprivation and hardship [she] experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law.'[66]

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[63] Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with Patriarchy', *Gender and Society*, 2.3 (1988), 274–90; Marilyn Fernandez, 'Domestic Violence by Extended Family Members in India: Interplay of Gender and Generation', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 12.3 (1997), 433–55; Geetanjali Gangoli and Martin Rew, 'Mothers-in-Law Against Daughters-in-Law: Domestic Violence and Legal Discourses Around Mother-in-Law Violence Against Daughters-in-Law in India', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 34.5 (2011), 420–29; Martin Rew, Geetanjali Gangoli, and Aisha K. Gill, 'Violence between Female In-Laws in India', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 14.1 (2013), 147–60; Maya Ragavan and Kirti Iyengar, 'Violence Perpetrated by Mothers-in-Law in Northern India: Perceived Frequency, Acceptability, and Options for Survivors', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2017, 1–23 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517708759>.

[64] Fernandez, p. 434.

[65] Rew, Gangoli, and Gill, p. 148. This is the very form of intersectionality that was highlighted in the previous chapter's readings of villainous mother figures.

[66] Kandiyoti, p. 279.

Within the context of bourgeois feminist fiction, mother-in-law characters have often fulfilled the abovementioned stereotypes, which is in keeping with the genre's goal of highlighting the forms of suppression endured by many women within the confines of the Indian family. For example, cruel mothers-in-law inhabit the extreme margins of Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* as well as Hariharan's *TFON*.[67] It is this tradition of turbulent and even violent relations between mothers- and daughter-in-law, in both the social and literary contexts, that Deshpande reconfigures through *TBV*'s Mira. While Mira never really becomes a mother-in-law, having died in childbirth when Kishore, Urmi's husband, was born, Deshpande chooses to explore female resistance and solidarity through what is essentially a *saas-bahu* relationship, even though these themes might have just as easily been mapped onto other peripheral characters, whether that be a friend, sister, mother, or even a stranger. This mother-in-law figure's agency is thus not harnessed to defend the patriarchy as seen in previous texts and in popular culture. In fact, through the foreclosure of her capacity to inhabit the role of the mother-in-law (through her death) and the freezing of her subjectivity as a young married woman who is a survivor of marital rape, she is instead presented as a victim to its enforcers and as a creatively agentic figure who finds resistance embedded in the act of journaling.

Urmi's retrieval and reading of this journal and her efforts to publish it present a solidarity between the women across time. Through this choice of presenting a burgeoning empathic identification between not just a mother and her daughter, but a daughter-in-law with her mother-in-law, the text thus encourages the reader to register this mother-in-law figure's complex subjectivity and to rupture the binary positions in which women are placed

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[67] In *FF*, Desai presents a critique of such mothers-in-law through a cousin of the protagonist who becomes a victim of domestic violence and blackmail (71) and finally loses her life to dowry burning (154), as well as through the neighbour Mrs. Joshi's mother-in-law who is described as 'rul[ing] that house like an evil empress of ancient history' (132). In *TFON*, Hariharan chooses to illustrate, through Mayamma's story, the trope of a mother-in-law's son preference and the torture meted out to a daughter-in-law due to her struggle to conceive, the prevalence of which is addressed also by the abovementioned sociological articles.

within patriarchal family structures to instead embrace forms of female solidarity in ways that have not been explored in the texts analysed so far in this thesis. It is also able to highlight this complexity through presenting this 'mother-in-law' in the process of becoming, rather than a static figure restricted to her position within the patriarchal family structure, as discussed below.

Through Mira, Deshpande uses the opportunity to represent an 'older' woman's daughterliness, and does so through the apparatus of nostalgia, as is particularly visible in the scene of the discovery and exploration of Mira's trunk by Urmi and two other family women, as Urmi first learns the tragic story of her mother-in-law (41-49). While for the *TFON* grandmother, being stuck in sepia restricted her ability to inhabit a complex position, for Mira, her frozenness 'like a fly in amber' is able, in fact, to erase her motherhood as Urmi 'struggle[s] to see a resemblance to Kishore' in the photographs she lifts out of the trunk. Mira instead 'remains a girl belonging to a certain period' (43), introduced with her full name – Mira Purohit Jr. B.A. (as opposed to the peripheral mothers so far who are known by their roles within the patriarchal family structure as 'Ai', 'Akka' or 'Masi') – and her daughterliness is emphasised by other artifacts Urmi chances upon that present her relationship with her parents. In Mira's references to her own mother in her journaling and poetry, she continues to eerily echo *DHNT*'s Saru and her disidentifications with her mother:

> 'Will I become that way too, indifferent to my own life, thinking it nothing? I don't want to. I won't. I think so now, but maybe my mother thought like me when she was my age. It frightens me. No, it doesn't, I'll never think my life, myself nothing, ever.' (101)
> '*Whose face is this I see in the mirror,*
> *unsmiling, grave, bedewed with fear?*
> *The daughter? No, Mother, I am now your shadow*' (126).

These diary entries and poems are thus employed by the text to allow Mira to slide between the roles of daughter, wife, mother and (in being read by Urmi) mother-in-law without being

reduced to any of them.[68] Through the feminist nostalgic device of the rediscovery of a

suppressed narrative that functions as this 'older' woman's *bildungsroman*, Deshpande thus

illustrates a possible reading in which 'the daughter [Urmi] can separate far enough from the

mother [in-law Mira] to perceive the mother's own daughterly needs' instead of freezing her

in her patriarchally assigned antagonistic role, and thus circumvent the urge to 'mythologize

the figure of the mother' so that she can 'bestow on her mother the same subjectivity that she

grants herself.'[69]

While the previously mentioned iterations of *saas-bahu* representations in popular

culture as well as the villainous mother characters highlighted in women's fiction in the last

chapter presented a strong argument about women's intersectionalities, they also placed

women in insurmountable binaries that in themselves functioned also as essentialisms. The

integration of a maternal character's autobiography as is undertaken here not only provides

space for the feminist practice of journal-writing and discovery,[70] but also allows for the

consideration of how women can 'accept and integrate both the mother and the daughter in

[them]selves' in resistance to 'patriarchal attitudes [that] have encouraged us to split, to

polarize, these images, and to project all unwanted guilt, anger, shame, power, freedom, onto

the "other" woman.'[71] The novel's reader is no longer interpellated within a discourse of

daughterhood that *alienates* mother characters (so that the interpellation is built through this

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[68] Her resistance to her renaming by her marital family (a convention in many communities in India) from Mira to Nirmala also finds space in the novel:
>   'Nirmala, they call, I stand statue-still.
>   Do you build the new without razing the old? […]
>   can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira.' (101)

[69] Davis, p. 521.

[70] The establishment of diaries and journals as a feminine form and a feminist practice has been undertaken by a number of critics in the late 1980s and early 1990s like Valerie Raoul, Cynthia Huff, Rebecca Hogan and Marlene A. Schiwy. Valerie Raoul, 'Women and Diaries: Gender and Genre', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 22.3 (1989), 57–65; Cynthia Huff, '"That Profoundly Female, and Feminist Genre": The Diary as Feminist Practice', *Women's Studied Quarterly*, 17.3/4 (1989), 6–14; Rebecca Hogan, 'Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form', *History, Theory, Criticism*, 14.2 (1991), 95–107; Marlene A. Schiwy, 'Taking Things Personally: Women, Journal Writing, and Self-Creation', *NWSA Journal*, 6.2 (1994), 234–54.

[71] Lawler, p. 253.

otherness), but in a more general, less rigidified discourse of 'womanhood.'[72] The text thus presents the Mira-Urmi relationship as the central axis within a framework of female solidarity.

This framework of solidarity also clearly extends between Mira-Kalpana who are connected by the narration of their traumatic experiences of sexual assault[73] and by Urmi's aim to publicise their stories, and Deshpande suggests that the fear, anger and trauma grows beyond the text to encompass Indian women, past and present, through a montage of mothers paralysed by 'this constant burden of fear for [their] daughter[s]':

> 'I told her to be careful,' Shakutai moans. 'Don't go anywhere with strangers,' Vanaa cautions her daughters. 'Why are you so late?' Inni asks me accusingly if I am a little delayed. I can remember the hysteria with which she greeted me when I came home once unusually late. 'Why does God give us daughters?' Shakutai cried out and I was enraged, but it follows, yes, it follows.' (150)

Urmi interpellates her reader into her own experience as a woman fearing for her safety when she states, 'I know how fearfully I look back, my heart thudding in panic, when I hear footsteps behind me on a dark deserted street' (149). This allows for the text's treatment of the theme of sexual assault to be read as an attempt to illustrate what Raksha Kumar calls 'whisper networks' in her article on the much more recent #MeToo movement in India and globally. Kumar notes that it is 'women's spaces, whether community spaces or friend networks' that hold the patchwork of female voices articulating such experiences, which the #MeToo campaigns have turned outward into public spaces. Such public articulation not only ensures accountability and consequences for the perpetrators, but also expands the forms of witnessing, resonance and solidarity that might be found in other women.[74]

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[72] The danger of erasing differences in positionalities and the necessity of highlighting the fissures within 'womanhood' in order to avoid another dangerous form of essentialising will be addressed ahead in this chapter.

[73] In fact, the text does not vocalise its characters' awareness of Mira's experience of sexual violence until it can create this association – 'What has happened to Kalpana happened to Mira too' (63).

[74] Raksha Kumar, 'Why the "Me Too" Movement in India Is Succeeding At Last', *Open Democracy*, 7 December 2018 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/me-too-india-succeeding-at-last/> [accessed 1 April 2021].

The text in fact creates such a resonance and witnessing between Mira and another unlikely ally, namely the wife who takes her position after her death, Akka (Kishore's step-mother and Urmi's living mother-in-law). Amrita Bhalla comments upon Akka's 'inexplicable and uncharacteristic weeping for Mira' upon reading her poetry, thus betraying the expected animosity between step-wives that, once again, forms a hoary tradition that might be traced back to the animosity between Kausalya and Kaikeyi in the *Ramayana*.[75] The text, however, clearly hints at more than one possible explanation for such an (apparently) exaggerated response: 'What memories of her own life did this poem bring back for Akka? Did they say it of her and her husband too? [...] Or were her tears born of pure pity for Mira, the frightened girl who feared 'the coming of the dark-clouded, engulfing night?'' (66). Akka is thus drawn also into the framework of solidarity through witnessing Mira's suffering, narrating it to the next generation of women as she tells the story of Mira's marriage to Urmi and Vanaa (47), being her first reader (44), and even encouraging the publication of her work (156). Through this, the text engages her in 'feminist modes of listening which can become ethical and political acts of solidarity and, perhaps, agency, on behalf of the trauma of the other' so that 'forgetting and suppression [can] be contested by active remembering.'[76]

Akka's representation in the text reinforces its investment in the formulation of a non-patriarchal solidarity which not only erases the labels within the patriarchal family system that dictate women's positioning into binaries and enforce their inhabiting of an 'uneasy

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[75] Amrita Bhalla, p. 51. While such expectation of animosity might be reductive of lived experience in which women, even within patriarchal confines, can and do express empathy and solidarity for one another, the concern here is with *representation* of women placed in conflictual positions. In mythology, popular culture, and literature (which includes the texts studied in the previous chapter), female characters have often been *represented* as concerned with accruing patriarchal dividends through diligent fulfilment of their duties as wives and mothers in a manner that undermines the possibility of empathic identification across patriarchally assigned functions for women. The analysis here thus only makes a claim for a shift between the representation of women placed in particular roles within the patriarchal structure of the family in bourgeois feminist fiction of the 1980s, and for similarly drawn characters in the 1990s. without any claim to the analysis' general application.

[76] Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, 'Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction', *Signs*, 28.1 (2002), 1–19 (p. 13).

collectivity', but also actively promulgates a matriarchal utopia. Deshpande has stated that, for her, the leitmotif of the novel is an image of 'three women, Urmi, Vanaa and her mother opening the trunk of Mira's books and poems. I saw it clearly – the dim light, the children sleeping on the laps of the women, the voice of Vanaa's mother reading out the poem.'[77] All the four women in this scene are related through one man, Kishore (Urmi's husband, Vanaa's brother, Mira's son and Akka's stepson), who does not appear in the text at all. Instead, Akka is described as matriarch to the two younger women (her 'in-law' status erased), Vanaa and Urmi's sisterhood as young girls is seen as being *disrupted* rather than strengthened by marriage, 'as if she, as Kishore's sister, and I, as Kishore's wife, moved away from each other, Kishore coming between us' (79), and while Urmi reads Mira from the position a daughter-in-law, Mira's *bildungsroman* is clearly structured to allow Urmi to escape from grieving her own daughter so that Mira is able to function even as a *replacement* for the chasm left behind by the daughter whose own *bildungsroman* has been cruelly aborted, so that Urmi also becomes her mother.[78]

The text thus inserts itself into a tradition of matrilineal narratives that feature 'the elegantly strong triad of grandmother mother daughter' (Mira/Akka-Urmi-Anu) which Audre Lorde theorised in *Zami* (1982) as an alternative to the conventional triangle of the patriarchal family of 'mother father and child,' in which the subjectivity embedded in the 'I' is allowed to flow within the triad rather than being rooted centrally in the child.[79] The novel's manifesto of matriarchal utopia crescendos at its presentation of a memory of Urmi at

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[77] Deshpande, *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays*, pp. 20–21.

[78] This slippage is made evident through a number of small hints peppered through the text, such as when Urmi brings home a photograph of Mira to be framed and it is mistaken by her mother to be a photograph of the daughter Anu (68), or when Urmi expresses the exact same sentiment for both 'girls' in two different scenes of the novel where she contemplates her sense of loss: 'And yet it is no parting, because Mira in some strange way stays with me, I know she will never go.' (135); 'Anu will always be with me. The link between us stays vibrant, alive.' (155)

[79] Audre Lorde, 'Prologue', in *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography*, Penguin Modern Classics (London: Penguin, 2018).

the cusp of motherhood herself when she retreats not only into a rural space, but a matriarchal rural space:

> They seem to me, even now, like an idyll, those two months we spent in Ranidurg, Vanaa, Mandira, the two new-born babies and I – with Akka the matriarch who looked after us all. Nothing existed but our physical needs, and those were all fulfilled. It was a primeval, innocent world. (114)

Clear connections are thus made here between rurality, matriarchy and nostalgia. Both Mira's story and Akka's comforting matriarchal home devoid of men are clearly marked by the sepia tint, evident from the atmosphere Deshpande creates for the scene of the trunk's discovery which teeters on the edge of Bollywood-inspired sensationalism, as the unveiling of the trunk with its ancient lock, creaking lid and sandalwood perfume experiences a timely disruption: 'And then the lights went out […] I returned with the lantern […] The children returned to the circle of light […] the flickering light set the shadows on the wall dancing and quivering' (44-45).

Thus far, the analysis of this text has focused upon the manifestations of nostalgia, matriliny and female solidarity through the representation of complex female subjectivities which echo in some ways the concerns of Indian feminism in the 1990s with the different pulls upon Indian women's loyalties and what solidarities might be possible despite them, or more aptly, *inclusive* of them. The erasure of patriarchal bonds as represented in this text can be seen as a radical solution to these concerns, visible in Urmi's defensive and vociferous insistence upon owning Mira's story whenever the threat of Kishore's disapproval (and *his* ownership of Mira as his mother) surfaces: 'I've worked hard at knowing Mira, I've read her diaries, gone through her papers, absorbed her poems, painfully, laboriously translated them into English. And now, I tell myself, I know Mira.' (174) This presentation of Urmi as an adamant researcher attempting to dig a mother figure out of her silence, suppression or anonymity despite a disapproving patriarchal social structure present parallels with the

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investigative and resistant nature of nostalgic feminist research work, both in India and globally, that developed a tradition in the late twentieth century.[80]

A most notable comparison in the Indian context is that of Susie Tharu and K. Lalita's *Women Writing in India* anthology, comprising the works of more than 200 Indian women who wrote between 600 B.C. and the twentieth century, which was published only a year before Deshpande's novel and in which the editors declared the following manifesto – 'we are interested in how the efforts of these women shaped the worlds we inherited, and what, therefore, is the history, not of authority, but of contest and engagement we can claim today.'[81] The editors' vivid descriptions of feminist contributors in search of their literary foremothers who scoured through old libraries, rare collections and archives for literary works, convinced historians to part with valuable information, met forgotten female authors, and finally edited and translated the works for the anthology, bear the same imprints of the establishment of a matriarchal heritage of literatures and resistance which promotes a nostalgically inclined form of female solidarity that Deshpande attempts to represent in *TBV*. As Tharu and Lalita also note, however, their anthology traces 'a feminist inheritance more powerful and complex, but at the same time more troubling, than narratives of suppression and release might allow us to suspect.'[82] The final element of the analysis of this text is therefore briefly going to consider how the text also exhibits, both consciously and subconsciously, its awareness of the concerns with a nostalgia that might erase differences leading to a re-essentialisation of the category of 'woman.'

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[80] The work of African-American feminists such as Alice Walker and Maya Angelou is particularly significant for this global tradition. In her celebrated essay 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens' (1972), Walker 'traces the roots of her own creativity not only in the literature of black foremothers (Phillis Wheatley, Zora Hurston and Nella Larsen) but in the everyday creativity of ordinary black women of the South – women like her mother.' (Ingman, p. 27. The prominence of the imagery of the garden in critical conversations surrounding mother-daughter relationships clearly indicates the centrality of this text within this field.

[81] Tharu and Lalita, 'Introduction', p. 36.

[82] Tharu and Lalita, 'Introduction', p. 37.

It is evident from the analysis of the representation of the two mother-in-law characters in this text that in *TBV*, Deshpande allows (at least some) peripheral mother characters to enact forms of resistance (whether in writing or listening/reading/witnessing) that are typically associated with feminist praxis, as opposed to those forms presented in the previous chapter where maternal figures remained agentic primarily within the bounds of their positionalities within a patriarchal hegemony.[83] The text, however, also presents suspicions against an overtly feminist agenda through the protagonist's mocking and Othering of the feminist filmmaker Priti who is placed in an ideological battle with Urmi as she attempts to extract Mira's story for her own motives – 'this is what I've been waiting for all these years, this is the movie I'm going to make, this is the story I'm going to tell' (39).[84] While Priti's attempts at co-opting Mira's story are thwarted by Urmi, this representation suggests the text's discomfort with its own nostalgic project since, as Nancy Batty has argued in her reading of the novel, Urmi herself problematically replicates Priti's desire to 'own' another woman's narrative.[85] The text thus offsets its interest in a feminist solidarity with its concern about 'the 'wages' of breaking a silence and of telling a story' without the individual's consent, which Urmi wishes to do for both Mira ('I have been imagining myself the hunter and Mira my prey' (135)) as well as Kalpana.[86]

Batty comments upon Urmi's attempts to elide the class differences between herself and Kalpana that are underlined in the text through Kalpana's mother's repetitive refrain of

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[83] This remains a common feature in the texts analysed in this chapter, thus supporting the thesis of a shift in trends of representation of mother figures in bourgeois feminist fiction between the 80s and the 90s.

[84] Ironically, it is Priti's quoting of Virginia Woolf and 'how we ha[ve] to know our mothers and grandmothers to know our situations' that leads Urmi to state: 'I knew then I could not work with her. I never could,' and to deny Priti the opportunity to tell Mira's story. (*TBV*, 40) This representation of a feminist project is in keeping with the observations made in Chapter 1 about Deshpande's discomfort with the label and ideology, which is also visible in other Indian female writers writing in English.

[85] Batty, p. 153.

[86] Amrita Bhalla, p. 59. In doing so, the text highlights the hierarchies present *within* the category of 'woman' and concerns itself with how one woman's privileged agency might thwart or impede another woman's free will. It thus clarifies the necessity of an intersectionality in reading women's 'solidarity' that accounts for the importance of consent in this feminist context as much as in a patriarchal context.

'Women like you [bourgeois women] will never understand what it is like for us [women from the working class]' (148, 149, 111).[87] While some critics have read Deshpande's portrayal of two grieving mothers from different classes as representation a solidarity across class boundaries, the text clearly betrays anxieties about how such a celebration of solidarity might be undertaken by a woman (or a feminist movement) marked by her (its) privileges who risks 'speaking for' the marginalised subject rather than creating the discursive space for her speech, and thus reducing a female subjectivity to an empty symbol or signifier that becomes mythologised.[88] As Maryam Mirza notes in her crucial study of bourgeois Anglophone novels and their representations of class, these texts' sparse representation of class hierarchies is especially surprising in the context of 'the omnipresence of economic subalterns within the domestic spaces of the privileged classes to which the vast majority of the exponents and readers of South Asian literature in English belong.'[89] In *TBV* (a text that at least represents working-class women), Mirza observes the lack of subaltern speech through Kalpana's being rendered mute by a coma and her mother being reduced to incoherence by her grief. In fact, Kalpana's mother Shakuntala only speaks 'either to call upon Urmila to help her […] or [as] a renunciation of speech whereby Shakuntala confesses to her verbal incompetence and asks Urmila to speak for her.'[90]

Thus, while *TBV* exemplifies 'the active and activist listening, empathic identification, and solidarity required to imagine the experiences of the other, and therefore of

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[87] Batty, p. 167. This engagement with class difference is evidently one of the few instances where the bourgeois nature of Indian feminism and of these texts, and its implications for intersectionality, erupts in its original form (The previously addressed representation of Mayamma in *TFON* does not directly address, even to this extent, the strongly visible disparities between the upper-class protagonist and the working-class 'retainer'). This thesis has thus proposed that the genre's representation of mother-daughter relationships might be read as a manifestation of its anxieties about intersectionality and female agency. This tendency of the genre to repress or sublimate an urgent public discourse into a representation of family conflicts, and the resulting critique of the texts' private nature, will be engaged with more deeply in the final chapter of this thesis.
[88] Karmakar, p. 75.
[89] Mirza, p. xv.
[90] Mirza, pp. 56–57.

the past,'[91] it also presents some acknowledgment of 'wounds and fissures' that mark the collective "we"'[92] of womanhood and the necessity of a polyphony that can encompass these differences. While the text is unable to provide such a multivocal framework outside of Mira's interjections within Urmi's narrative (that continue to be influenced by Urmi's interpretations), it does perhaps hint at women's continued inhabiting of different subject positions within a framework of solidarity by once more manifesting it within mother-daughter interactions. The trope of an imperfect mother-daughter relationship, visible in the above examples between Mira and her mother but also represented through a plethora of other mother-daughter pairings (Urmi and her own mother, Vanaa and Akka, Vanaa and her daughters, and Kalpana and her mother) thus continues to feature in the text but no longer devolves into hateful disidentification or the portrayal of mother as 'villain'. It is instead accompanied by the powerful possibilities of disrupting such binaries that have been highlighted so far in this text.

The possible resolutions to these anxieties about intersectionality and female solidarity that influence this text's interpretation of the theme of a feminist nostalgia are going to be central to the analysis of the two remaining texts in this chapter. These texts' utilisation of the tool of polyphony, which allows for multiple speech genres and complex female subject positions to be enunciated, offer the authors further opportunities to explore questions about the representation of the mother, her nostalgic function, and its implications for women's identities and intersectionalities in 1990s India, as they echo Lynne Huffer's path of questioning on the challenges of depicting maternal agency:

> How does a daughter write about or even to a mother without consigning the mother to the absence, invisibility, and silence on which a certain conception of writing traditionally depends? How does she do *that* and, at the same time, undo the patriarchal logic through which the concept of mother exists at all? How does a

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[91] Hirsch and Smith, p. 12.

[92] Richa Nagar, 'Storytelling and Co-Authorship in Feminist Alliance Work: Reflections from a Journey', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 20.1 (2013), 1–18 (p. 8).

daughter "kill the womb," as Nicole Brossard puts it, and also make way for maternal life emerging in some other form?[93]

<center>*</center>

The Mother in the Polyphonic Novel

If the texts in the previous chapter emphasised daughter-centricity and female agency within patriarchal bounds, and the texts analysed above contemplated how the maternal voice might be recouped through embedding her voice within the daughter's narrative, in the latter half of the 1990s, Deshpande's *A Matter of Time* (1996) and Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) present even more radical and clearly feminist forms of co-authorship through their iterations of polyphony. Mikhail Bakhtin's theorisation of the novel's heteroglossia has established the novel as a genre which encompasses various forms of speech, each of which 'permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized).'[94] In the feminist context, as Richa Nagar notes in her article on co-authorship as feminist alliance work, the accommodation of multiple voices in a single text 'allows an alliance to explore and interrogate the complex intersectionality of caste, gender, education, privilege, and location,' and this exploration results, not in a 'perfect resolution', but in 'a continuously evolving struggle' and a scrutiny of one's own 'multiple – sometimes conflicting – experiences and truths.'[95]

This section of the chapter thus explores how fictional texts might present attempts at developing such a 'polyvocal framework attuned to the complex politics of difference'[96] through the presence of a Bakhtinian heteroglossia, so that they might embody in some way

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[93] Huffer, p. 4.

[94] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, 17th edn (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 259–422 (p. 263).

[95] Nagar, pp. 11, 4.

[96] Patricia Connolly, qtd. in Nagar, p. 5.

the feminist imperatives of 'allo-identification' as defined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, or 'strategic essentialism' as theorised by Gayatri Spivak.[97] Both Deshpande and Kapur present in their texts the possibility of mothers and daughters sharing the responsibilities of storytelling through their respective (and often disagreeing) perspectives, with the larger aim of developing a matrilineal narrative framework that continues to emphasise forms of solidarity, but also presents more radical possibilities for intersectionality.

This section will first briefly analyse how Deshpande's next novel, *A Matter of Time*, reaffirms the author's allegiance in this period to themes of nostalgia and storytelling through its representation of a peripheral mother figure, and how the text's use of polyphony specifically reconfigures these themes by providing more agency and complexity to this mother so that it bolsters the project of 'making way for maternal life to emerge'. The argument about the impact of polyphony upon maternal representation in the bourgeois feminist text will be further developed through the final analysis of Kapur's text, *Difficult Daughters*, and its particularly successful project of disrupting the binaries that forestall a feminist intersectional solidarity while also foregrounding this solidarity as a 'continuously evolving struggle' encompassing multiple and conflicting truths through its manifestations within a matrilineal intergenerational narrative.

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[97] Sedgwick's concept of 'allo-identification' recognises that 'a politics like feminism' relies upon 'nonperfunctory enfoldment of women alienated from one another in virtually every other relation of life' into identification as and with women. Spivak's concept of 'strategic essentialism' lauds the '*strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest'. Both theorists thus provide ways to circumvent the fragmentation of identity beyond any possibility of identification, and formulate methods to justify the use of an admittedly broad, reductive label such as 'woman' to serve a larger ideology of resistance. Eve Sedgwick, 'Introduction: Axiomatic', in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 1–63 (p. 61); Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', in *In Other Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 197–221 (p. 205).

A Matter of Time

As the analysis of three of Deshpande's novels in this thesis has already made evident, certain themes and patterns are discernible and repeated within this author's work, and these patterns continue their echo in *A Matter of Time*. In some ways, these repetitions aid the analysis in its attempts to draw out the shifts and changes that become visible within a relatively formulaic narrative, even as they present the danger of the analysis *itself* becoming trapped in repetition. In order to avoid this, it might be prudent to first address these similarities, particularly those that mark this text as belonging to the 1990s trilogy alongside *TBV*.

The first of these is Deshpande's own anecdotal emphasis upon a maternal and relatively peripheral character (rather than a daughter-protagonist) as the central focus of the text: 'Githa Hariharan, the writer, once said to me that our file names could be very revealing. For this novel, the file name was at first Kalyani. Which was also the first tentative title of this novel.'[98] Kalyani, in this text, occupies the position of mother and grandmother to whom the prodigal daughter Sumi and granddaughter Aru return when their heteronormative family structure is destroyed by the decision of the patriarch Gopal to leave them. Clearly, then, the text also repeats the formation of a matriarchal utopia, this time in response to the recurrent dissolution of 'the impressive patriarchal lineage that is literally inscribed into the House' to which the younger women are returning.[99] With Gopal being the third male within the text's narrative to desert or leave behind the family's women, the women remain to occupy an

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[98] Deshpande, *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays*, p. 24.

[99] Batty, p. 191. For Batty, this disruption of the patriarchal design is a symbol of the house having 'fallen into a state of infertility and decline' (191). The text itself seems to suggest this in its description of the female-only home as being 'lopsided, not balanced enough' (I.4). The analysis here, however, reads this lopsided, infertile home as an instance of resistance to a patriarchal heteronormativity, which seems to present in these texts the only possible form of intergenerational female solidarity that can also address women's intersectionalities without placing them in binaries.

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ancestral home that was built by a male ancestor 'for his sons, and his son's sons' (Prologue, 'The House') but has instead transformed into a 'zenana' (I.4).[100]

That this matriarchal space is marked by nostalgia is also made evident by the origin story of the novel which is recorded as arising when Deshpande 'saw an old stone house with a garden, a relic of its past glory, in Malleswara[m], a locality still exuding an old-world charm in Bangalore, now the computer capital of India.'[101] This suggests that the text's representation of the house and its inhabitants is imbued with a metonymic nostalgic contemplation of a particular historic formation of family, city and country that has been lost in India's transition to a global economy in the 1980s and 1990s. Maternal centrality to this nostalgia is also evident in Kalyani's role as chronicler of family histories who is tasked with narrating an illustrious lineage dating to the eighteenth century[102], thus solidifying her function in the family project of 'jointly produc[ing] and maintain[ing] its memory' through which 'its cohesion and continuity is ensured.'[103] More importantly, however, Kalyani is also recruited into a feminist nostalgia concerned with recouping more marginalised female histories, which is embedded in her tracing a matriliny encompassing five generations of mothers and daughters (Aru – Sumi – Kalyani – Manorama – Indubai/Arundhati)[104], partly through oral narration and partly through the detective work seemingly required of all female descendants attempting to uncover names and histories by searching 'through piles of papers,

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[100] A non-paginated e-book version of this novel has been used. Quotes from the text are therefore cited by section number and chapter number instead (for example, Section I, Chapter 4 is cited here as I.4).

[101] Amrita Bhalla, p. 63.

[102] In her capacity as family historian, Kalyani elucidates the connections between private and public histories as she narrates Maratha campaigns in the Karnatak from the eighteenth century which lead to the family's consolidation as rich landowners near the south Indian city of Bangalore. Batty further reads the text's allusion to the 1991 assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi as a comment upon the echoes and connections between unresolved personal and national traumas, particularly in the context of communal violence. These manifestations of public and private will be central to the arguments made in the next chapter. Batty, pp. 186–87.

[103] Misztal, pp. 18–19.

[104] Kalyani is placed at the centre of this matriliny, thus allowing the text to present her both as granddaughter (to Indubai) and grandmother (to Aru).

old diaries and letters' or seeking out ancient family connections with elders who might have memories of these women (II.3).

Further, if the feminist nostalgic project of 'remembering' and reinstating women to history in *TBV* was alluded to through the method of retrieving Mira's story (from journals and poems hidden in a trunk in the attic), here, the connection to this project is made even more explicit by including not only the stories of family women, but also that of an early female educator Yamunabai, who 'had […] 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 childbearing' (III) in a likely ode to the true histories of pioneering nineteenth century female educators such as Savitribai Phule and Fatima Begum Sheikh. The text thus follows in its predecessor's footsteps in marking matriarchy and nostalgia as central to its conceptions of both private and public canvases of feminist empowerment and solidarity.

Addressing this reemphasis of matriarchy and nostalgia allows the brief analysis of the text here to focus instead upon what the text does *differently* through its polyphony that presents the opportunity to explore more complex ideas about women's subjectivities. The text's flitting between the first-person narration and free indirect discourse of three generations of women (Aru, Sumi and Kalyani) as well as of Gopal (Deshpande's first male narrator) marks a clear departure from the previously observed daughter-centricity of Deshpande's novels. This polyphony has been understood by Deshpande and by critics as contributing to 'a wider perspective, more outwardness and less introspection' as compared to the early novels.[105] It hasn't been recognised, however, for its implications of matriliny which allows the text to engage in 'the weaving of a tapestry whose threads are tied to different generations' of women where, 'as the spinning goes on, a more complicated

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[105] Deshpande, qtd. in Amrita Bhalla, p. 74. It is interesting that the inclusion of a male narrator is automatically connected to 'more outwardness,' which hints at certain biases in the formulation of public/private spaces and which voices are allowed to speak in and for each space. These connotations will be addressed further in the next chapter.

network of relationships is thus developed.'[106] The text's polyphony adds particularly to its radicality, not just because it includes a (much-celebrated) male narrator, but also because it presents the (grand)mother's voice and experience as a legitimate, complex and *present* intertext in the novel, which has not been depicted by any of the novels studied so far.

In her function as chronicler and (grand)mother, the text's polyphony allows Kalyani to move past a mythical register; she is not the passive mythical origin to be hunted by the daughter, but instead inhabits the position of daughter-detective herself (as shown in her hunt for her grandmother's name, described above) as well as being a source of marginalised family histories for the younger generations. While this once again paints another older generation of women (the grandmother's foremothers) as restricted within sepia-tinted nostalgia, the polyphonic integration of the conflicting perspectives of three women in different subject positions within the family structure (more than any text studied so far) is able simultaneously to highlight the pitfalls of such daughter-centric representation. Further, Deshpande's continued depiction of uncomfortable mother-daughter relationships as a manifestation of anxieties about intersectionality is also aided by this polyphony as a dialogue forms between Kalyani and her daughters' diverse, even conflicting, memories and emotions connected to their motherly and daughterly roles. The novel's multivocal framework thus helps further its matrilineal and intersectional agendas. It also has a powerful impact upon the portrayal of the mother character's nostalgic storytelling function within the narrative.

In Kalyani's exploration of a female lineage through her own mother and grandmother, the text seems to showcase the 'discursive power of female memory' which becomes 'the lifeline and family line that sustain[s] and safeguard[s] the continuation of

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[106] Yi-Lin Yu, *Mother, She Wrote: Matrilineal Narratives in Contemporary Women's Writing* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004), p. 68.

marginalized, endangered cultures or subcultures.'[107] The text particularly presents an ode to

female storytelling as a form of community and identity in its descriptions of the scene where

the *bildungsroman* of Kalyani's mother is built (II.2):

> 'when the two women, Kalyani and Goda, speak of the past, they are playing cat's
> cradle, skilfully transferring the thread from hand to hand, from finger to finger,
> creating a design between them […]'

> 'the past seems to flow rich and thick between them'

In these moments, the women might yet be understood as functioning only as transmitters of

history and identity, restricted to their function as 'storytellers relating the wondrous things

that happened in the past' (II.2).

However, the text introduces another important element that presents these older,

peripheral women as agents and allows for the argument to read radicality into their

storytelling; it presents their *control* over the story which becomes, here, 'a consciously

constructed intertext wherein family (hi)stories are re-written imaginatively.'[108] The text's

representation of nostalgia thus differs from the texts studied earlier in this chapter because of

its emphasis upon women's influence upon the history they relay, thus presenting the

nostalgic role itself as a form of agency for these older women even as it presents

possibilities for solidarity through constructing a female lineage. The above textual quote of

Kalyani and her sister communally depicting the past continues as follows:

> '[…] creating a design between them, a design that allows certain facts to slip
> through. Clearly, there are stories concealed in the interstices of silence.'

The text continuously emphasises these forms of silence within the family history that

constitute 'a well so deep, dark and unfathomable, that [Sumi] draws back.' In Nancy Batty's

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[107] Clarisse Zimra, 'What's in a Name: Elective Genealogy in Schwarz-Bart's Early Novels', *Studies in 20th Century Literature*, 17.1 (1993), 97–118 (p. 101); Yu, p. 3.
[108] Kishori Nayak K, '(Hi)Stories, (Her)Stories as Point-Counterpoint: Fiction as Countermode to Theory in Shashi Deshpande's Works', in *Theory as Variation*, ed. by R Radhakrishnan and others (Delhi: Pencraft International, 2007), p. 268.

reading of this text, these silences which conceal Kalyani's traumas from the younger

generations of women, the articulation of which 'would be as painful as the process of

childbirth' (II.3), function as censorship and are understood to have the now-expected

psychoanalytic implications for these younger women because of 'the importance, for a

child's successful passage through traumatic events, of maternal care and speech.'[109] This

thesis's focus on the mother's own agency, however, allows Kalyani's deliberate laconism to

be read differently because of the function of storytelling itself as an instrument of control –

'In making and telling stories we rework reality in order to make it bearable.'[110]

Storytelling allows Kalyani to inhabit her daughterliness (this time made much more

explicit in the text as it notes that 'in the relating of her memories, [she] goes back to the

earlier part of her life, making it seem as if she was only a daughter' (II.2)) even as she fulfils

her (grand)motherly nostalgic function, to develop forms of community where it becomes 'a

form of restorative praxis – of sharing one's experience with others, of finding common

ground' (as noted above), and finally, also to 'act in the face of forces that render [her]

inactive and silent' in what Aru notes as 'the part of her life that *she has edited out*' (II.2,

emphasis added).[111] The import of this editing for the text's presentation of female solidarity

becomes evident in its attempts to break the chain of transgenerational haunting highlighted

in texts with troubled mother-daughter relationships. In her analysis of maternal genealogies

in two novels that represent the inherited traumas of black women, Gil Zehava Hochberg

notes 'the inescapable and severely limiting effects that the duty to carry on the painful

legacies of their collective past has for women (mothers and daughters) who are subject to the

ordained ethical demand "to remember"' since 'it keeps women attached to the place of the

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[109] Batty, pp. 197, 218.
[110] Jackson, p. 36.
[111] Jackson, p. 23.

wound.'[112] The fear of such transgenerational haunting is clearly present in Deshpande's text, as Sumi wonders:

> 'And will this, what is happening to me now, become part of my daughters too? Will I burden them with my past and my mother's as well?' (I.5)

Though the text suggests that this inheritance of trauma is inevitable, it also highlights Kalyani's attempts at reconfiguring this past through her storytelling function which might provide her and the daughters that follow the opportunity to escape this inheritance, while emphasising those elements of this past that allow for the formation of a collective female identity. Kalyani can thus be read as a 'reflective nostalgic' who highlights the fragmented nature of memory which can be 'rife with omissions, and fraught by contradictions'. Such omission and contradiction can become forms of agency since 'reflective nostalgia allows a person to decide how to remember, what to omit, and how to deploy these memories' so that nostalgia itself becomes empowering.[113] In the text, Kalyani represents her own escape from the legacy of a troubled mother-daughter relationship when she states, 'I'm luckier than my mother. She's the unlucky one who didn't know how to enjoy her children and grandchildren' (III.4),[114] and Sumi also finally leaves behind her own fear of this haunting- 'I know my life is not like my mother's' (III.3). Through its representation of Kalyani as a reflective nostalgic and the radical possibilities this nostalgia holds for forms of women's identification with each other despite their disparate positions within the family structure, the

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[112] Hochberg, p. 3,6.

[113] Hillsburg, p. 2.

[114] The continued representation of troubled mother-daughter relationships is visible in Kalyani's mother Manorama being read by critics as 'tyrannical, dominating and wilful' and their relationship being construed as 'a throwback to Saru's with hers in *DHNT*'. Through Sumi and her sister Premi's perspectives, the text also presents Kalyani's shortcomings and even violence in her motherly role during their childhood (II.3). The fear of cycles of deprivation is thus made even more evident, as are the possibilities for strong disidentification and the representation of mothers as stereotypically villainous. And yet, the text seems to avoid such a representation of Kalyani (and even to some extent, Manorama), instead emphasising each woman's understanding of the (O)ther's complex subjectivity. Amrita Bhalla, pp. 65, 69.

text thus contributes to the overall shift in the formulation of female-female relationships in texts from this decade.

Whether the text allows Kalyani to *succeed* in her attempts at reflective nostalgia might still be questioned, since, ultimately, its structure as a form of mystery novel insists upon the revelation of its (and Kalyani's) crypts through the narration of Kalyani's forced marriage to her uncle, her loss of her only male child at a train station, and the consequent loss of her husband as he angrily shuts her out of his life for this maternal failure. Notably, however, these secrets are not revealed to the (grand)daughters by Kalyani 'who seems to have exorcised all her ghosts' (II.3), but by other members of the family, and despite these revelations, the text emphasises resistance (as it notes Kalyani's survival of these events (II.3)) and solidarity (through the grandmother Kalyani and granddaughter Aru, who are both recruited in the novel's feminist-detective project of 'plunging into the past […] to refashion [their] family history out of carefully chosen material' (II), and who end the novel 'standing side by side, two women, the two faces, one old and the other so young, linked by a curious resemblance' (III.5)).

The text's larger polyphonic canvas thus allows its engagement with matriliny and nostalgia to be deeper, and perhaps even more successful, through its depiction of nostalgic storytelling as a complex but powerful form of potential female agency. Its final contemplation of ideas of destiny and agency arguably re-centralises Kalyani's nostalgic function. The novel ends with the following aphorism – 'If […] we are bound to our destinies, […] even then, this remains – we do not submit passively or cravenly, but with dignity and strength' (III.5), which mirrors the potent ability of storytelling to '[give] us a sense that though we do not exactly determine the course of our lives we at least have a hand

in defining their meaning' and emphasises an identical complex conception of resistance beyond a simplistic public/private, modern/traditional or old/young binary.[115]

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Difficult Daughters

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* is the final text of this chapter's analysis as well as of the chronology of publication of the novels studied here. Indeed, if we were suggesting a simplistic chronology of the treatment of history, nostalgia and female agency within the canon of 'bourgeois' feminist fiction, this novel might represent a crescendo in such a linear narrative of the genre's search in the 1990s for a solution in which the mother and her agency need not disappear in the daughter's quest for identity, but might in fact have the opportunity to speak alongside her to create a more complex representation of female subjectivity.

The title of the novel makes explicit the text's preoccupation with the very forms of intergenerational solidarities and intersectionalities that this chapter's arguments have highlighted, as it asks with each new generation represented in its matrilineal narrative, 'How ha[ve] girls changed so much in just one generation?' (55). The text undertakes this explicit project of exploring women's positionalities and relationships with each other through an even more radical polyphony hitherto unexplored in this genre. This polyphony disrupts temporal linearity and challenges ideas of historical truth so that women's 'private' nostalgic function can be harnessed to present resistance to a 'public' nationalist restorative nostalgia as well as to present the strongest echo to the contemporary feminist concern with polyphony, as evidenced below. This final textual analysis of this chapter is thus going to concentrate on how Kapur's narrative reconfigures the genre's treatment so far of this thematic of mother-

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[115] Jackson, p. 35.

daughter relationships and its import for the representation of female agency and contemporary feminist debates in the bourgeois feminist novel of the 1990s .

The text's project of representing an intergenerational saga of mothers and daughters differs from the narratives studied so far, not only in making this the central and explicit focus of the storyline (as opposed to daughter-centricity), but also in the method it utilises to represent these relationships. The mother's featuring as a sepia-toned intertext in the daughter's autobiography (whether through memory, transpositioning, journal-writing or storytelling) is replaced here by the *daughter* (Ida) being reduced to an intertext so that she only fulfils her function as the detective who must uncover and imaginatively rewrite her mother's *bildungsroman* by undertaking a pilgrimage to the places her mother once inhabited.[116] The mother is thus allowed to escape the confines of her daughter's perceptions of her (a project which Ida herself consciously bolsters, being conscious that '[s]hould my memory persist in touching her, the bloom will vanish into the mother I knew, silent, brisk, and bad-tempered' (2)) as the text undertakes, in the second chapter, a precipitous shift to a free indirect discourse that closely follows the consciousness of Ida's mother Virmati as a young girl growing up in Amritsar at the height of the Indian Independence movement. This polyphony and break in temporal linearity (through constant movement between mother and daughter, past and present) establishes the text as a matrilineal nostalgic novel which moves beyond the mother as intertext to instead entirely inhabit the older woman's subjectivity, and presents opportunities for highlighting the women's different subject positions within the family structure.

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[116] It was observed in the analysis of *TBV* that two daughters in the text are silenced, allowing for a contemplation of motherhood to take centre-stage. In *AMOT* too, one of the daughter figures, Sumi, is silenced at the end of the novel as she dies in a road accident. In *DD* then, the new trope of the silenced *daughter* (rather than mother) is carried even further, supporting the thesis of a shift away in the bourgeois feminist novel from daughter-centricity in this decade.

The inclusion of the daughter-detective in its polyphonic nostalgic project primarily ensures that the text does not espouse a simplistic modern daughter versus traditional mother (Ida versus Virmati or Virmati versus Kasturi) formulation as it depicts the tribulations of women in twentieth century north India. This dichotomy is instead replaced by a matrilineal inheritance of both collusion and resistance to patriarchal norms, thus aiding the text's representation of complex female agency and negotiation. Within the lineage of Kasturi's unnamed mother-Kasturi-Virmati-Ida (who are all speaking subjects in this time-travelling text), each mother is irate at her daughter's resistances to patriarchal injunctions, particularly in this daughter's desire to be educated; when Kasturi exclaims 'What crimes did I commit in my last life that I should be cursed with a daughter like you in this one?' (55) in response to Virmati's choice of education over marriage, she replicates her own mother's fears that her education 'brought disgrace to the family' and would reduce her chances of marriage (56), and Virmati shadows her mother and grandmother's desire to curb the daughter's free will when she 'tighten[s] the reins on [Ida] as [she] grew older' (258).

While this continued cycle of women imposing patriarchal expectations upon other women clearly supports the form of 'uneasy collectivity' highlighted in the last chapter, each mother's need to enforce this control also suggests each daughter's refusal to conform.[117] Thus, while Ida explicitly highlights her 'female inheritance' of the patriarchal compunction to 'adjust, compromise, adapt' (236) from her foremothers, the narrative itself simultaneously presents a female inheritance of shadow resistances to patriarchy. For example, it highlights a clear resonance between the women in their experiences of abortion across the twentieth century as each woman negotiates her sexual agency within her particular context (7, 144, 154). This experience presents a possible form of intergenerational empathy and solidarity as

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[117] While we do not witness Kasturi's mother as nonconforming, the pattern within the matriliny indicates, or even necessitates, her undertaking of similar forms of resistance.

they speak to each other's experiences: 'I knew, Mother, what it was like to have an abortion' (144). The incorporation of each woman in her daughterly form through the novel's polyphony thus ruptures a simplistic understanding of the maternal figure as a patriarchal mouthpiece, instead highlighting her complex negotiations with these discourses throughout her life as well as her perspective on her own and her daughter's resistances. This representation once more highlights the necessity of a strategic essentialism across generational difference that echoes the feminist concern with finding a solution to the fragmentation of the identity of 'woman' when placed under the ideological pressures of the discourses of religion, politics and nationalism. The feminist theorist's underlining of the complexity of female agency when placed within such a discursive framework is replicated in the 'bourgeois' feminist text's presentation of solidarity across boundaries of 'tradition' and 'modernity'.

The novel's intention of showcasing women's complex negotiations between colluding with and resisting patriarchal discourse and the impact of these negotiations upon female-female relationships is particularly achieved through Virmati's marriage, which becomes an important case study for this analysis. Her 'love' marriage to Harish highlights choice or resistance within a specific Indian context in which there is a cultural emphasis upon 'the heterosexual romantic couple, located at the heart of Bollywood's cinematic enterprise' that survives 'a long litany of trials and tribulations' to finally marry. Kapur thus uses a trope which Megha Anwer and Anupama Arora read as a celebration of 'post-liberalization politics of individuated choice' in 1990s India.[118] In the face of family disapproval and through Virmati's association of this relationship with 'freedom and the right to individuality, the sanctity of human love' and opposition to 'the tyranny of social and

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[118] Megha Anwer and Anupama Arora, 'Love, Interrupted: Caste and Couple-Formation in New Bollywood', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 2021, p. 1 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2020.1867476> [accessed 4 May 2021].

religious constraints' (157), the narrative of her marriage is loaded with such connotations of choice. However, for all its iconoclasm, the relationship is also embedded within an undeniably patriarchal framework in that she is her husband's second wife and it is a choice that they attempt to buttress using the rhetoric of custom, as when Harish states, 'Co-wives are part of our social tradition' (112). The trope of the modern children versus conservative parents that continues to surface in popular culture today is thus disrupted by Kapur's depiction of this relationship which cannot be claimed as rebellious or feminist, since both the internal and social dynamics of the relationship are steeped in patriarchal ideology.

The relationship between the co-wives also becomes a space for complex agential negotiations as they battle over the territory of home and husband through shadow resistances (adding too much salt or sugar to the other's food, ruining laundry, ensuring they cannot enter each other's spaces, for example) (212-13) even as they outwardly express a rhetoric of helplessness in the face of their fate as ordained by the patriarch Harish: 'our destiny is predetermined', 'whatever happens is for some ultimate good', 'duty is our guide and strength' (194). The women are thus depicted as strongly agentic within the domestic space even though this form of agency ossifies patriarchal control rather than dissipating it. Through these representations of female agency, Kapur is thus able to restate Sangari's contention that 'neither the consent nor the resistance of women can be interpreted as a Manichean drama with an enveloping patriarchy alone.'[119] The polyphony of the text further aids this representation of complex maternal agency since, by refusing an omniscient narration of events, the text does not allow a resolution of such aporias in its presentation of female agency. Instead, the contradictions and negotiations only re-establish the novel's emphasis upon a tradition of 'daughters' as 'difficult'.

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[119] Sangari, p. 869.

In depicting such a matrilineal inheritance of complex shadow resistances for its present generation of daughters and in emphasising a polyphony of female subjectivities that negotiate between the various discourses, this late 1990s text seems to understand the contemporary feminist concern with 'the need to join hands and build alliances with other forces' in response to the advent of both Hindu nationalism and neoliberalism, as discussed in the second chapter.[120] In their article about the various challenges that feminism in the 1990s had to grapple with, Agnihotri and Mazumdar emphasise the very same amalgamation of solidarity and intersectionality that this chapter has attempted to highlight in the various texts it has studied. They identify multiple forms of solidarity as necessary to feminist discourse in this time, the first being an intra-movement unification as various organisations come together to form joint delegations and issue joint statements, each of which then also emphasise the necessary work required to battle 'the pressures of divisive identity politics […] which is so inimical to women's rights and the movement for equality'[121] and highlight the fight against neoliberal impositions upon the Indian economy that adversely affect women, since in their 'multidimensional roles, as workers, as peasants, as producers, as citizens, as mothers, wives, daughters, as women, the economic policies hit [them] the hardest.'[122] Even as these statements present strong reasons for the necessity of solidarity across religious, caste, caste and cultural affiliations, Agnihotri and Mazumdar also highlight the movement's concern with ensuring an intersectional approach:

> The limits to creating an essentialist, biological entity as well as identity of 'woman' have become only too obvious […] As the proto-fascist undertones of political events/processes become clearer along with the state's surrender to them, the need to

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[120] Agnihotri and Mazumdar, p. 1876.

[121] YWCA, 'Report of Joint Women's Delegation to Ahmedabad, Surat and Bhopal' (1993), qtd. in Agnihotri and Mazumdar, p. 1874. This report was by 'a joint delegation of national women's organisations which visited three of the [communal] riot-affected cities in February 1992' (1874).

[122] Agnihotri and Mazumdar, p. 1876. This statement is from a joint document published in 1994 by the Delhi Network of Six National Women's Organisations' titled *Some Issues in the Struggle for Women's Equality*. (1878)

join hands is felt ever more deeply, lest we come out with a cri de coeur – "we have the movement but they (the other?) have the women."[123]

In fictionally representing the balance that women (and the movement) must achieve between finding common ground and forms of empathy, while also preventing the essentialisation of a 'female' identity, we have theorised here that Kapur and other female authors writing in English particularly utilise the tools of nostalgia/matriliny and polyphony. It is evident, however, that the abovementioned feminist concerns recorded by Agnihotri and Mazumdar grapple with a number of crucial intersectional affiliations based in economics, class, religion, caste, and social status that are not centred at all in these texts. Instead, these much larger debates have been read here as manifesting within the mother-daughter relationship and the much more private family structure that is strongly marked by privilege, since these texts represent women from upper-class and upper-caste families (*Difficult Daughters*, for example, represents a Punjabi Arya Samaj family in the early twentieth century and Madhu Kishwar's study of the Arya Samaj in Punjab highlights its origins in 'an urban educated elite,' to which this family would arguably belong.)[124] While the next chapter will specifically study the bourgeois feminist novel's navigation of ideas of 'public' and 'private', the final section of analysis for this novel is going to investigate the incipient engagement with public discourses that takes place in *DD* in order to signpost to the beginnings of a strong engagement within the genre with national histor(ies) and women's positions within them.

Of the novels studied so far in Chapters 3 and 4, *DD* is the second to include the context of the Partition. In Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, the violence that the Partition caused in the city of Delhi is placed at the margins of the text, visible only through the

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[123] Agnihotri and Mazumdar, pp. 1876–77.

[124] Madhu Kishwar, 'Arya Samaj and Women's Education: Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21.17 (1986), WS 9–24 (p. WS 9).

crimson sky and the white smoke symbolising the riots, and a solitary mention of refugee camps.[125] Despite this evasion of a critical moment in national history, Desai's text has been read by critics as an allegorical representation of nation, evident in its inclusion by Elleke Boehmer within a canon of 'keynote postcolonial *Bildungsromane* or, more broadly, novels of formation,' that presents the trajectory not only of its protagonists but also of a nascent country trying to find its feet post-independence. [126] In this text, Desai presented only the rippling effect of public events upon personal lives, and yet, the narrative can be considered one of the more explicit engagements with national history in comparison to the other texts studied thus far. Kapur's presentation of national histories in *DD* further expands this engagement and utilises the theme of nostalgia in order to do so.

As the daughter-detective Ida embarks upon her search for her mother, she simultaneously includes a search for nation, so that her developing identity encompasses the personal tribulations of her foremothers as well as that of her people and nation; exploring her mother's *bildungsroman* becomes the medium for her to also explore the idea of an unbifurcated Punjab as 'home'. The intertwining of these goals is evident as Ida undertakes a journey to Pakistan as part of her quest:

> I want to go to Lahore, I want to see the place where my mother was educated after so much trouble. I want to see the place that had been the Mecca for all Punjabis […] The centre of Punjab, its heart and soul, and how much else besides. (126)

It can be argued therefore that *DD* foreshadows a number of texts published in the 2000s in which women become intimately connected with national history and its consequences within the text's 'present'. In Virmati's strand of the narrative in the 1940s, Kapur presents plot points that are directly impacted by violence of the Partition; for example, Virmati's father's

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[125] Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day*, p. 67; Kamila Shamsie, 'Introduction', in *Clear Light of Day*, Vintage (Gurgaon: Random House India, 2007), pp. ix–x.

[126] Elleke Boehmer, 'Differential Publics – Reading (in) the Postcolonial Novel', *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 4.1 (2017), 11–25 (pp. 14–15).

death during the panicked stampede caused by tear-gas firing during a Hindu Mahasabha procession directly leads the estranged daughter to re-enter her natal home (219-220). In Virmati's subsequent move to Lahore and her refusal to return to her husband, too, it is clear to the contemporary reader that political circumstances will force an end to her resistance and lead the narrative to helplessly draw to a historically predefined conclusion – the Partition of India and her return to her husband. However, the text goes beyond representing a passive jostling of characters by history, to presenting their role in the act of creating it and negotiating with it through their agency, as evidenced in the text's engagement with early Indian feminism.

Ida's nostalgic search for her mother leads her to also document the stories of early pioneering feminists who enacted their resistances in the vicinity of her mother (125). On the other hand, Virmati's presence at the feminist conferences run by these women is instead marked by her sense of being 'out of place, an outcaste amongst all these women' (133), as she negotiates between her desire for her lover and his control over her, and her involvement in such a narrative of resistance to patriarchal discourses; one of the very few instances of Virmati showcasing her sexual agency in the text is presented at this conference as 'scenes from her private life came unbidden before her eyes' and she recalls the 'moan[ing] and arch[ing] with pleasure' in scenes that were hitherto narrated as encompassing *his* desire and her reluctance (133). The text thus not only engages with the history of women's activism in India but also the contradictory pulls of different affiliations upon the individual women who engage in this activism, representing a navigation of these loyalties as a form of agency in itself. While Virmati's relationship with this political milieu is cloaked in this discomfort, allowing her to remain at the margins of such action, these negotiations allow themselves to be read as prototypes for the women in the texts published in the next decade who engage directly with the political milieu and signal a metamorphosis of the genre.

Thus, in *DD*, Kapur utilises the tools of nostalgia and polyphony to intertwine the personal and national discourses that influence the 'conditions of possibility' within which the individual agent can enact her resistance. This becomes particularly evident in the text's rendering of the Partition which actively challenges a singular, nationalist-patriarchal narrative of nation-formation as various contradicting memories of the violence of the event intertwine and stand in ironic contrast to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's famous 'Tryst with Destiny' speech (placed at the end of the section) which presents India as 'vital, free and independent,' while the collective memories that precede it emphasise 'murdering, looting, raping […] the forced conversions – people dying of hunger' and the strife and hatred generated between Hindus and Muslims (252). The text thus pits a 'national memory [that] tends to make a single teleological plot out of shared everyday recollections' in which 'gaps and discontinuities are mended through a coherent and inspiring tale of recovered identity' against collective forms of memory in which 'individual reminiscences […] could suggest multiple narratives' through having 'a common intonation […] but no single plot.'[127]

Here, the manifestation of polyphony in the text moves beyond accommodating multiple voices to also reflect multiple and contradictory realities, allowing an open structure that gives 'the reader maximum scope for interference through interpretation,' which Maria Shvetsova notes as a central feature of the Bakhtinian dialogic novel.[128] Thus, through its reflective nostalgia that is marked by melancholy and disorder, the text investigates the daughter-detective's familial and national lineages and ensures that both are protected from any sepia-tinted glorification, while showcasing how each is irrevocably intertwined with the other and creates possibilities of agency and negotiation for the women who inhabit the text. The final lines of the text continue to underscore this melancholy and disorder as the daughter

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[127] Rubenstein, p. xviii.
[128] Maria Shvetsova, 'Dialogism in the Novel and Bakhtin's Theory of Culture', *New Literary History*, 23.3 (1992), 747–63 (p. 754).

who has completed her journey in search of the mother articulates the fragmented nature of the story she has narrated and the necessity of her imagination in creating it as 'each word [of the book becomes] a brick in a mansion [she] made with [her] head and [her] heart' (259). Having completed her nostalgic pilgrimage of tracing a matrilineal inheritance of both collusion and resistance to patriarchal norms, the daughter then surrenders the mother to this word-mansion: 'Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be. Do not haunt me anymore.' In doing so, she showcases how the daughter-protagonist of the bourgeois feminist novel might '[relinquish] her longing for the fantasied, idealized mother who gave birth to her […] [and] figuratively [give] birth to her own revitalized self.'[129]

Conclusion

This thesis has so far suggested that the representation of maternal figures and their agency has been stereotyped or restricted within the genre of bourgeois feminist fiction in ways that can be connected to the contextual feminist exploration of the intersectionalities of women's subjectivities that allow for their agencies to be enacted in various feminist and non-feminist contexts. It has explored the ways in which a focus upon these characters' agencies and resistances provides a renewed perspective upon this genre's engagement with contemporary events. If the previous chapter diagnosed the clashing of the old and the new in consequence of seismic shifts in the country's economic and social conditions as manifesting in the mother-daughter relationship, this chapter has found a possibility of reconciliation embedded within the same relationship in its featuring perhaps a Spivakian strategic essentialism through its presentation of nostalgia, matriliny and intersectional solidarities itself as a possible form of resistance to the patriarchal divides between women. While the shorter study of the depiction of the grandmother in Hariharan's *TFON* presented the possible traps for the

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[129] Rubenstein, p. 164.

maternal subject within a restorative nostalgic function, the analysis of the mother figures in Deshpande's *TBV* allowed the chapter to showcase forms of intergenerational solidarities and the formation of a matriarchal utopia that function as forms of maternal resistance. The incipient polyphony embodied in Deshpande's subsequent novel *AMOT* presented the opportunity to underline the agency available to the mother as speaking subject in her nostalgic storytelling function, while the more radical forms of polyphony depicted by Kapur in *DD* strongly highlighted the intersectional nature of female subjectivities and their necessary negotiation between discourses.

As noted intermittently throughout this chapter, each of these text's concerns with female solidarity and intersectionality were identifiably also central concerns for the Indian feminist movement in the 1990s as it grappled with the 'identity crisis' induced by neoliberalism and the consequent resurgence of strong nationalist and Hindutva sentiments that have been identified in this chapter's introduction as also seeping into contemporaneous popular culture. The iterations of reflective maternal nostalgia investigated in this chapter, which speak to both the nationalist impetus for nostalgia and the feminist impetus for recovering a matrilineal lineage of resistance, can be theorised as perhaps offering an alternative to the more aggressive forms of nostalgia that reflect in popular cinema as well as in the communally-charged violence that took place in this decade in India.

If the texts from the 1980s registered an ambivalence in the daughter's attitude towards the mother figure in order to highlight the futility of placing women in binary positions of modern/traditional, urban/rural, feminist/patriarchal, these texts from the 1990s unequivocally abandon, and even critique, such dichotomisation, and instead foreground and celebrate shadow resistances which are also able to account for the complex intersections of women's identities. The historical and sociological investigations into female agency undertaken in this decade (studied in detail in the second chapter of this thesis) evidently

present similar arguments about the futility of binary positions and reiterate the negotiations required between 'old' and 'new' as they study women's participation in Hindutva and neoliberal projects, which outwardly present as 'traditional' and 'modern' respectively, but are exposed in these works as encompassing a negotiation between the two.

Thus, in the context of India in the 1980s and 1990s, the bourgeois feminist novel's depiction of the mother-daughter relationship has been read here as a manifestation of larger political debates surrounding female agency and intersectionality. This argument of sublimation continues to highlight the 'private' nature of these novels which clearly make very few direct references to the political discourses that were central to national conversation in these decades and directly impacted the lives and agencies of women. The next and final chapter is going to trace how, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, this genre evolves to more directly engage with these public concerns and how (or if) the mother-daughter relationship survives this shift in focus, particularly in terms of the possibilities for maternal agency both within and without the private sphere of the home.

Chapter 5

Mothers in the Public Domain

We 'saw hordes of women pouring out of their homes' – Uma Rao[1]

Introduction

The above epigraph from Uma Rao's study of women at the frontline of the Indian nationalist struggle in the 1930s presents an enduring image of movement, a motion between the two perpetually debated spaces of 'public' and 'private'. The words mark out the home as a predetermined space in which women exist and from which they must exit to participate in the public arena of political debate and resistance. Indeed, the history of the Indian women's movement roots itself in this epistemic spatial shift caused by Gandhian nationalism which presented 'its invocation of the Hindu woman as a political subject and its invitation to her [...] to leave the sanctity of the home for the hazards of the street (all in the name of India).'[2] It explains the weight carried in its aftermath by the terms 'public' and 'private' within our understanding of women's agency, where the inside is associated with 'conformity and inaction' alongside domestic responsibilities of motherhood, daughter, and wifehood, while the outside/world is marked by the 'possibilities of her quasi manhood – freedom, risk, glory,

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[1] Uma Rao, 'Women in the Frontline: The Case of U.P.', in *Women and Indian Nationalism*, ed. by Leela Kasturi and Vina Mazumdar (New Delhi: Vikas, 1994), pp. 28–52 (p. 38).

[2] Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 11. As the first chapter of this thesis has noted, Gandhian nationalism feminises resistance itself, thus creating the conditions in which women can become active political participants. In this reconfigured national space, both *ghare* (home) and *bhaire* (outside) become imbued with resistant possibilities, as seen in the *Swadeshi* movement where household consumption was central to defying British laws. However, the Gandhian expectation of women's 'return' to home betrays its investment in conventional ideas of 'public' and 'private'; women's political citizenship is then an anomaly that is forced by dire circumstance rather than an unquestioned right.

death.'[3] It is clear that Gandhian nationalism saw this movement as circular rather than linear (in that the women 'were expected to return to [an unchanged home] after serving the nation[4]) and various critics including Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty have delineated the centrality of the private sphere (and its associations with femininity) to the development of nationalist ideology in colonial India.[5] However, the binary opposition of private/public and its gendered connotations continues to hold sway in our understandings of female agency, as demonstrated by the critical appraisals of literary texts, especially those authored by women, that this thesis has highlighted so far. This particular restriction of the texts within the private sphere (and the resultant narrow scope) has been castigated as such by some literary critics, including Rajeswari Sunder Rajan who therefore titles this fiction as 'bourgeois' in its feminism. It is this private scope that comes under Sunder Rajan's critical censure through the description of one of Shashi Deshpande's protagonists, Jaya, who stands on the balcony *watching* 'the world of work, politics, even physical geography' from a distance rather than participating in it.[6]

The above critique of Jaya's passivity reads the home more as a refuge from serious concerns that this elite protagonist is protected from than as a stultifying space from which women must escape to develop a sense of self. The narratives examined so far in this thesis in fact might be read as primarily navigating 'the inherent ambivalence' of the home 'as a site of peace and sanctuary, on the one hand, and of danger and incarceration, on the other', as the prodigal daughters return to a natal home imbued with the former sense of safety while also questioning its latter entrapments from which they originally intended to escape.[7] The

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[3] Malashri Lal, *The Law of the Threshold: Women Writers in Indian English* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1995), p. 17.

[4] Geetanjali Singh Chanda, *Indian Women in the House of Fiction* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2008), p. 301.

[5] Chatterjee; Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Difference – Deferral of (A) Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal', *History Workshop Journal*, 36, 1993, 1–34.

[6] Sunder Rajan, 'The Heroine's Progress', p. 226.

[7] Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft, 'Introduction', in *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 11–26 (p. 24).

predominance of the language of safety and protection in relation to the home in readings like Sunder Rajan's points directly to the function of class in these novels, necessitating their reading as 'bourgeois', since the criticism is levelled not directly at the private sphere but at the particular class location of these women who can *afford* to exist only within the private sphere.[8] As Rosemary Marangoly George points out, 'it is difficult to decide whether sulking, weeping, boredom and running away', which feature heavily as forms of expression and perhaps even resistance in these novels, 'are the very features of elite entitlement or a protest of the same [...]. For the materially comfortable upper-class woman to assert her own needs or to assert her dissatisfaction with the limitations placed on her is to have a tantrum.'[9] George engages thus with the limitations placed upon the spheres of influence that the bourgeois feminist novel can aspire to, since political action is seen as being 'beyond the scope of this writing because the players (authors, protagonists and implied readers) are often those left out of the political and linguistic scenarios in which resistance, as understood in the literary context, is formulated.'[10]

The formulation of resistance within the Indian postcolonial literary context is instead reserved for a form of national allegory epitomised in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and the spate of allegorical fiction that followed in the wake of its publication, and 'bore the

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[8] The historical connection between privilege, class, and the private sphere is remarked upon both generally and in the Indian context. Nancy Fraser has noted how, in the early modern period, 'new gender norms enjoining female domesticity and a sharp separation of public and private spheres functioned as key signifiers of bourgeois difference from both higher and lower strata.' (60) The Indian example is presented in Sumanta Banerjee's essay about the formation of the Bengali *bhadralok* and the importance of upper-class women's distancing from the popular cultural traditions of the public sphere where class boundaries between women were easily elided. Elizabeth Jackson's literary analysis of bourgeois feminist fiction presents this argument in the precise context in which this argument is being made here. Jackson underlines how, in these novels, 'the "juggling of domestic and career responsibilities [is presented] as a relatively recent phenomenon' even through '[p]oorer women have always had to contribute to the family finances by working out the home.' (108-9) Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', *Social Text*, 25/26 (1990), 56–80; Sumanta Banerjee, 'Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, ed. by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 127–80; Jackson, 'Motherhood and Other Work'.

[9] George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*, p. 135, p. 142.

[10] George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*, pp. 134–35.

burden of nation.'[11] There is thus a gendering of the scope and representation available for novels that wish to be included in the canon of the Indian English Novel, due to 'an unwritten assumption that postcolonial or third world literature must deal with the nation, with colonialism, with the trauma the colonial era has created in order to receive recognition in the international scene.'[12] While the Anglophone works of male authors like Rushdie or Amitav Ghosh are also marked by elitism and '[t]he contradictions of aspiring to dissent while at the same time occupying the political mainstream', they are still seen as engaging in a newly-developed 'technology of national self-criticism' as well as fulfilling the postcolonial 'need to represent the spectacular intensity of the anticolonial movement, the resplendent moment of liberation, and the throbbing energy of neoliberal progress.'[13] In contrast, Anglophone works by female authors like Desai, Deshpande, Hariharan and Kapur that focus on 'subjective interiority rooted in the domestic and the regional' (at least until the 1990s) are relegated to the margins of public discourse.[14] Majumdar's focus upon this idea of interiority highlights, importantly, that while some female authors' works (for example, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*) have been included in the postcolonial canon, the concern here is specifically with the canon of 'domestic' texts that are dismissed for the lack of commentary upon broader ideas of nation. The gendering thus is not connected to the gender of the *author* as much as to the gender of the text. The work of these authors writing

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[11] Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, 'After Midnight's Children: Some Notes on the New Indian Novel in English', *Social Research*, 78.1 (2011), 203–31 (p. 203).

[12] Mrinalini Sebastian, qtd. in Batty, p. xxviii. The most well-known debate upon this theme of the incessant imposition of national allegory upon 'Third World Literatures' is that which took place between Frederic Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad. In his book *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures,* Ahmad argues against the marginalisation of those texts which do not place postcolonial nationhood at the forefront of their narrative.

[13] Sunder Rajan, 'After Midnight's Children: Some Notes on the New Indian Novel in English', p. 210; Robert Fraser, *Lifting the Sentence: A Poetics of Postcolonial Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 33; Saikat Majumdar, 'Far from the Nation, Closer to Home: Privacy, Domesticity, and Regionalism in Indian English Fiction', in *A History of the Indian Novel in English*, ed. by Ulka Anjaria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 207–20 (pp. 219–20).

[14] Majumdar, pp. 219–20. I am grateful for the insightful comments of Professor Claire Chambers on the disparity in the treatment of male and female authors from 'bourgeois' backgrounds at the White Rose South Asia conference in May 2019, where I presented parts of this chapter as a conference paper in a panel chaired by Professor Chambers.

'domestic' fiction is thus questioned on the basis of gender (as Shashi Deshpande bitterly

notes, 'women's writing is always the *zenana*')[15] as well as of class:

> Should we assume that women in the upper echelons of the Indian class structure,
> fluent in international currencies (English, western feminisms) are necessarily the
> ones from whose acts and whose writing, feminism and other progressive ideas will
> emanate? What preparation do these women have – outside their investment in the
> Romantic idiom – that will awaken them to "their gifts"?[16]

The bourgeois feminist novel thus grapples with straddling 'public' and 'private' (or at least

simplistic formulations of these terms) as it meanders through the personal lives of women

and is exhorted to comment more directly upon national politics.[17] Its scope seems to remain

focused upon 'the most marginal elements of [upper class women's] lives, embodied in the

ordinary and trivial moments of the everyday and in the undefined liminal spaces between the

public and the private' which make its author and protagonist vulnerable to the charge of

being 'Western-educated figure[s] navel gazing at their elite marginal positions as both

insiders and outsiders to India' for whom 'India is a metaphor not a lived reality.'[18]

Perhaps in response to such critique of their texts' scope or as a necessary call to

action in an increasingly divisive time (which resulted from the BJP's rise as a formidable

opponent of the ruling Congress party and the dangerous rhetoric of the Ramjanmabhoomi

movement that resulted in both the Babri Masjid demolition of 1992 and the Godhra riots of

2002, as noted in Chapter 2), these authors begin, at the turn of the millennium, to engage

directly with the political milieu within which they are producing these narratives, thus

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[15] Shashi Deshpande, qtd. in Batty, p. xxvii.

[16] George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*, p. 160.

[17] This straddling of a threshold between private and public is of course embodied also within the act of writing (and publishing) fiction. While Geetanjali Chanda notes how women's writing is itself seen as a crossing of the *Lakshmana Rekha* (a transgression into the public sphere), Sara Ahmed theorises that the spatial configuration of the writer's home also marks 'the study, the room dedicated to writing or other forms of contemplation' as 'a masculine domain at the front of the house', while housework which helps 'sustain an orientation towards the writing table' is performed by women 'as wives and servants' and remains invisible. Chanda, *Indian Women in the House of Fiction*, p. 194; Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 30–31.

[18] Majumdar, p. 218; Chanda, *Indian Women in the House of Fiction*, p. 10.

engaging in a rebranding of their fiction. This shift echoes a larger recognition amongst liberal Indians in this moment of the fading relevance of the ruling class to ideas of nation and its replacement with, as Sunder Rajan puts it, 'the new, and newly relevant, Indians who are now the upwardly mobile Dalit intellectuals and […] entrepreneurs.'[19] In this new India, the liberal elite's primary function is to show that 'members of this versatile educated class can re-invent themselves as the allies of the new meritocracy and find new uses for their seemingly anachronistic English education.'[20] It is a concern with allyship, and a contemplation of the responsibilities of the privileged in voicing dissent against dominant forms of oppression (primarily Hindutva), and yet preventing 'the ventriloquism of the speaking subaltern' which would re-centre the upper-class, upper-caste protagonist, that seems to dominate the representation of female agency in a number of novels published in the 2000s.[21] Through its continued focus on representations of female agency, this chapter is interested in investigating the canon's sudden breaking of tradition through introducing a new form of Indian women's writing in English, and the texts' renewed negotiation between ideas of private and public, representer and represented, and their contemplation of their own role in the contemporary public sphere.

In the interest of this investigation, this chapter asks, is the bourgeois feminist novel able to escape the confines of the private and represent political intersectionalities through a renewed focus upon marginalised communities in the 2000s? Can its previous investments in presenting women's differing experiences of womanhood through a narrow focus on mother-daughter relationships be seen as a progression towards more overt acknowledgement of religious and political difference? Do these texts succeed in presenting a necessary

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[19] Sunder Rajan, 'After Midnight's Children: Some Notes on the New Indian Novel in English', p. 204.

[20] Sunder Rajan, 'After Midnight's Children: Some Notes on the New Indian Novel in English', p. 205.

[21] Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. by Rosalind Morris, Revised (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 31–99 (p. 39).

intersectional political solidarity, or do they grapple with concerns of tokenism, voyeurism, and an inability to rupture the bubble of Hindu upper-caste, upper-class privilege? If the public sphere is marked as the arena where these explorations must take place, what happens, then, to the private sphere (and the characters cloistered within it)? Is agency and solidarity in this space a just sacrifice at the altar of more radical public politics and is a reductive, unnuanced private versus public binary reintroduced through this shift? How, in effect, are its ideas of resistance altered when the bourgeois feminist text attempts to be directly political?

This chapter will incorporate analysis of the forms of female agency represented in Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* (2003), Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies* (2000), Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* (2002), and Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories* (2009); all of these texts are bound together not only by their publication in the 2000s but also in their direct engagement with the two critical Hindu nationalist events, namely the demolition of Babri Masjid and the Godhra riots in Gujarat.[22] While all four texts depict the same events (alongside smaller, more local instances of communal violence), this chapter is interested in the different approaches the authors undertake to representing upper-class feminist women's roles and agencies in the context of such violence, while also clearly contributing to a specific trend in this time of publishing fiction that showcases some investment in resisting the communal atmosphere created by these two events.[23] The chapter will engage primarily in an analysis of the texts' representations of domestic and public spaces, and their particular

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[22] The details of these traumatic events and their consequences for ideas of nation, citizenship and specifically for women's identities have been explored thoroughly in the second chapter of this thesis. The sources used in the early contextual chapters of the thesis clarify the profound impact of these two events upon understandings of the Indian polity at the turn of the millennium, as well as representing the sudden increase in contemplation of the ideas of secularism, communalism, religion, class, and caste in the aftermath of these events. Throughout its readings, this thesis has been interested in the particular impact of these circumstances upon representations of women's agency, whether in subtle or direct ways, and it has aimed to conduct such analysis in the context of feminist work on women's relationship with secularism and religion during this period of upheaval.

[23] The organisation of these texts' analysis in the chapter presents a progression in the manner of the texts' interaction with these two events. While Deshpande's *Small Remedies* predates Hariharan's *In Times of Siege*, the latter is studied first because of its alignment with an earlier trend of centring male characters in political narratives.

configurations of the interactions between the personal and political through the representation of home and world. To begin such an analysis, it is first necessary to identify the spatial politics of 'bourgeois' feminist fiction as a genre so far, so that we can more closely observe the rupture that takes place in the 2000s in the text and its characters' relationship with 'private' and 'public'. In the following section, we thus engage briefly with the central motif of 'home' as seen in the novels studied so far in this thesis, to identify *how* and *why* there is a shift in the 2000s to more direct political representation.

Ghare/Bhaire and the Logic of Spaces in the Bourgeois Feminist Novel

In an interview with Lakshmi Holmström, Shashi Deshpande states the importance of the domestic space to the conception of her narratives: 'For me it's essential – almost as essential as it is for a movie director – to have the shape of the house clear. I know all the houses in my novels […] as an architect does, all the rooms, even if I may not use them.'[24] Indeed, in each novel by Deshpande as well as other female authors under study here, the navigation of the home space is central to the plot. The previous two chapters of this thesis have already highlighted this centrality, with each protagonist 'return[ing] to her ancestral home in a journey that can be compared to a return to the womb [with its] sticky walls.'[25] This parallel to the womb clearly hints at these daughter-protagonists' appraisal of the function of the domestic in their self-constitution. As they undertake this journey, marked by constant movement toward and away from the home (as well as within the home), their internal monologues seem to straddle two relationships with 'home' that echo debates within feminism about the connotations of domestic space. The analysis undertaken in chapters 3

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[24] Lakshmi Holmström, 'Interview: Shashi Deshpande Talks to Lakshmi Holmström', *Wasafiri*, 8.17 (1993), 22–27 (p. 23).

[25] Nilufer Bharucha, 'Shashi Deshpande', in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: South Asian Writers in English*, ed. by Fakrul Alam (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006), CCCXXIII, p. 107.

and 4 of this thesis helps identify this ambivalence towards the home, which vacillates between its rejection as a patriarchal 'illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself', and its continued pull as a 'place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries.'[26]

In the third chapter, this thesis focused upon daughter-centricity which seems to reject the principles of feminine sacrifice apparently manifested in the (domestic) wifely and motherly roles. The daughter-protagonists of these texts thus espouse a radical feminist 'rejection of domesticity [that] has seemed a principal, if not *the* principal, tenet of feminist demands for freedom' which can be traced 'through the western tradition of feminist writing […], including […] Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, and […] Virginia Woolf' and which clearly manifests itself within this urban Anglophone feminist writing as well.[27] The fourth chapter, on the other hand, read into the texts' representation of a nostalgic feminist solidarity that is also rooted in these daughter-protagonists' recognition of the upper-class home as 'training grounds for cultural continuity' through its connection to female ancestors whose history provides direction to the daughter-protagonist's own search for identity, and through its provision of a safe space to undertake one's mothering role (a luxury that is

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[26] Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Biddy Martin, 'What's Home Got to Do With It?', in *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practising Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 85–105 (p. 89).

[27] Rachel Bowlby, 'Domestication', in *Feminism Beside Itself*, ed. by Diane Elam (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 71–91 (pp. 77–78). The neoliberal context in which this rejection of domesticity takes place in Indian feminism must be acknowledged; as noted in Chapter 1, the feminist focus in the post-Independence period shifted from women's motherly/wifely roles to the daughter and the working woman, in tandem with women's introduction to the workforce. Economic liberalisation at the end of the twentieth century contributed further to this shift, specifically for the urban bourgeois female population (as Budhwar et al note, employment opportunities created in the liberalised economy have been 'mainly for educated women residing in urban areas'(p.180)), thus contextualising the movement away from the domestic in both the Indian feminist agenda and the modes of agentic representation for protagonists in 'bourgeois' feminist fiction. This movement into the public sphere of the urban upper-class, upper-caste woman also accounts for her reckoning with the intersectional nature of identities which become more evident when differences of caste and class can be encountered in the public arena that are not present within a homologous private sphere. Pawan S. Budhwar, Debi S. Saini, and Jyotsna Bhatnagar, 'Women in Management in the New Economic Environment: The Case of India', *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 11.2 (2005), 179–93.

unavailable to working-class women who are 'driven by the necessity to earn their living' outside the home and to thus juggle their mothering role alongside the breadwinner's).[28] This particular feminine relationship with 'home' is recognised as one that remains 'fundamentally unaltered by historical and political change', allowing for the static self-centredness of the politically disengaged bourgeois text that is criticised by feminists.[29]

While these previous chapters did not directly address class concerns, our current focus upon the domestic allows for a recognition of class privilege as central to these characters' associations with public and private spaces. Rosemary George argues that the radical feminist rejection of domesticity reifies the public/private binary by refusing to acknowledge the kitchen table as a possible space for radical conversation, as it has been, for example, within black feminist endeavours such as The Kitchen Table Press.[30] The daughter-protagonist of the bourgeois feminist novel subscribes to this strengthened binary (both in rejecting the private sphere as static, and in finding safety within it), thus betraying the texts' focus on the privileged Brahmin upper class reality that relies upon the order implicit in such a separation of spheres.

Such representation of the home as a homogenous 'safe space' that is outside the scope of radical female agency signals the exclusion of intersectional voices within this definition of the 'private', suggesting a direct connection between the class location of the texts and its authorial voice. 'Home' is thus understood, by the text, its author, and its critics, as a class-determined space which demands feminine obedience and collusion with patriarchy that is to serve as the 'talisman against the fall into chaos and *lower class status*.'[31] As Geetanjali Chanda argues, upper-class women are read as being 'vulnerable outside the

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[28] Chanda, *Indian Women in the House of Fiction*, pp. 27, 176; Krishnaraj, p. 6.

[29] Chanda, *Indian Women in the House of Fiction*, p. 180.

[30] Rosemary Marangoly George, 'Recycling: Long Routes to and from Domestic Fixes', in *Burning Down the House: Recycling Domesticity* (New York: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 1–22 (p. 9).

[31] Chanda, *Indian Women in the House of Fiction*, p. 112 (emphasis added).

protection of domestic patriarchy', with the mythological, metaphoric *Lakshmana Rekha* operating in both the factual and fictional realms. [32] Thus, in both the rejection and the celebration of the domestic, the bourgeois feminist novel (and its criticism) presents a homologous and apolitical private sphere that is distinctly upper-class.

In contrast, the argument of this thesis has been a reclamation of this private space and the possibilities of quotidian agency that it offers its upper-class inhabitants, reading these as particularly embedded within the maternal figure and her function in the narrative, whether as foil to the central daughter figure, or as a source of identity and nostalgia. The danger (and futility) of rejecting domesticity and the necessity of rupturing the private/public binary is clearly recognised within feminist circles since, as Martin and Mohanty point out, there is a fear of 'handing over notions of home and community to the Right.'[33] A rupturing of the private/public binary thus becomes necessary through the need for the private sphere to be reclaimed as a possibly agentic space.

In light of this rupturing, the analysis of agency in the texts so far has thus attempted to 'make the domestic a site from which countertheorisations about seemingly "larger" and unrelated institutions and ideologies can be produced', in particular, feminist ideology.[34] The overall argument has centred the possible ways in which these 'private' texts are contributing

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[32] Chanda, *Indian Women in the House of Fiction*, p. 21. The *Lakshmana Rekha* refers to the Hindu epic text, *The* Ramayana, in which a line of protection is drawn around the goddess Sita's abode by her brother-in-law Lakshmana to prevent any intruders into the house while she is alone. Sita breaks past the protective line to offer alms to a disguised Ravana (the antagonist), leading to her kidnapping.

[33] Mohanty and Martin, p. 85. The possibility of such co-option of the vocabulary of home by the Right is clearly visible in feminist contemplations (explored in the second chapter) of why women might choose membership of the women's wing of a radical Hindutva organisation over that of a grassroots feminist organisation – the first is considered conducive to the woman's domestic function due to its focus upon filial and religious uniformity that replicates the family structure, while the second is considered a threat to the unity and peace of the home and its hegemonic patriarchal functioning. Additionally, the fact that movement from the private to the public sphere does not automatically signal feminist, or even peaceful resistance has been evident in the instances of women's engagement in public violence during intercommunal riots that were presented in the second chapter. While these instances of engagement have been recorded primarily in the middle-class or lower-class Hindu family (and not the English-educated upper echelons of Indian society that the 'bourgeois' feminist author writes about/for), it does not discount the strong presence of support for the Hindutva cause within the upper-class Hindu home.

[34] George, 'Recycling: Long Routes to and from Domestic Fixes', p. 3.

to a larger contemporaneous discussion, from the 1980s onwards, on the various pulls upon Indian women's allegiances in a fraught political environment that led to the questioning of the foundations upon which the Indian feminist movement was built. In this reading, if the daughter-protagonist's overt critique of the patriarchal nexus corroborates with the Indian feminist movement's aim to expose and tackle the gender discrimination evidently rampant in the country, her (as well as the text's) attitude towards her mother figures hints at the more troubling intersections of gendered experience with discourses of religion, politics, class, caste, and nationalism.[35] Such a reading of the domestic and its maternal residents allows 'home' to be understood 'not simply as a dwelling-place for women's memory but as one of the foundations of history, centring alternative agency in both counterhistories (as Antoinette Burton reads it) and counterpublics (as Nancy Fraser reads it).[36]

As noted above, however, there is a radical shift in the logic of space within the 'bourgeois' feminist texts published at the turn of the millennium which become preoccupied with the dangers of Hindutva manifested in the public space, and focus on the manner in which this directly impacts the lives of their female characters' agencies, whether in the public or the private sphere. The canon's move away from allegorical (even if unintended) commentary on national concerns towards an overt engagement with Hindutva in these texts is explained by the issue's centrality to public discourse as well as to notions of citizenship in the late twentieth to early twenty-first century. As Sunder Rajan notes, '*Opposing* this nation – or opposing *this* nation – is the new patriotism' in neoliberal India, thus solidifying the

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[35] While there are some texts by 'bourgeois' feminist authors, such as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, that are overtly concerned with the intertwining of the domestic with the political (as evident in this quote from the text – 'Something happened when the personal turmoil dropped by at the wayside shrine of a vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasibly, public turmoil of a nation.'), the readings here might more aptly be defined as allegorical. The 'bourgeois feminist text' is thus provided with the opportunity to be read as a Rushdie-esque national allegory. Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (London: Harper Perennial, 1997), p.19.

[36] Burton, p. 4; Burton's work on Indian women writers Janaki Majumdar, Cornelia Sorabji and Attia Hosain in the early twentieth century presents a long lineage of women attempting 'to claim a place in history at the intersection of the private and the public, the personal and the political, the national and the postcolonial.' (p. 4)

'bourgeois' feminist text's keenness to rebrand itself as a genre that is at the centre of national political discourse (with, of course, the expected inflection through the lens of gender).[37]

The authors' own visible engagement with politics in the new millennium further supports this hypothesis of a concerted shift. Shashi Deshpande's vehement denial of the label of a feminist activist (discussed in Chapter 3) morphs into vociferous activism in the 2010s.[38] While Githa Hariharan's first novel *TFON* was marked by its interiority and distance from public events, her later work, both in fiction and in action, directly resists jingoistic forces.[39] Manju Kapur similarly moves beyond the Austenesque approach of 'making huge statements about the world by talking about the domestic lives of women' (a technique well

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[37] Sunder Rajan, 'After Midnight's Children: Some Notes on the New Indian Novel in English', p. 206. It is important to note that both Sunder Rajan's and my argument here understand political 'centrality' as affected directly by class privilege that entails 'a subtle sense of entitlement that is often accompanied…by the weight of an exacerbated consciousness of responsibility' that does not necessarily correspond to the importance of the upper classes and their literary pursuits in the country's material political atmosphere. (204) As Sunder Rajan goes on to argue, English writing in India by privileged authors 'must not be aggrandized as a writing that risks repression by the state' (212).

[38] Instances include her resignation from the Sahitya Akademi General Council when it failed to speak out against the murder of progressive scholar M.M Kalburgi in 2015. In this resignation letter, she asked 'what hope do we have of fighting the growing intolerance in our country?', thus directly addressing the impact of the rise of the BJP upon the national atmosphere. (Rebello) In light of the murder of journalist-activist Gauri Lankesh, Deshpande exhorted a resistance of uplifted voices, stating 'one of the best ways of loving our country is refusing to be afraid, refusing to be silenced.' (Indian Express) In 2018, on the eve of the BJP government's re-election, Deshpande directly criticised the government and its abetment of the rising tide of Hindutva in her keynote speech at the Goa Arts and Literature Festival. (Scroll.in) Joeanna Rebello Fernandes, 'Award-Winning Author Shashi Deshpande Resigns in Protest', *The Times of India* (Delhi, 9 October 2015) <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/award-winning-author-shashi-deshpande-resigns-in-protest/articleshow/49286139.cms> [accessed 26 April 2022]; Shashi Deshpande, 'From Silence to Speech', *Indian Express*, 8 September 2017 <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/from-silence-to-speech-gauri-lankesh-journalist-murder-4833497/> [accessed 27 April 2022]; Shashi Deshpande, 'Shashi Deshpande: "Will India Become a Hindu Nation and Non-Hindus Become Second-Class Citizens?"', *Scroll.In* (Delhi, 11 December 2018), section Across the Divide <https://scroll.in/article/905221/shashi-deshpande-will-india-become-a-hindu-nation-and-non-hindus-become-second-class-citizens> [accessed 27 April 2022].

[39] Hariharan is particular in arguing for artists' freedom, contending that 'the BJP-RSS and its casteist allies unmake India by depriving Indians of their rights, not only to write, but to read what they will' (Indian Express), while also heading resistant political coalitions such as the Palestine Solidarity Committee in India and the Indian Writers' Forum. In her writing, she has voiced her opinions on matters such as the conferment of a lifetime achievement award upon a Hindutva apologist (V.S. Naipaul) and the Kashmir conflict. Githa Hariharan, 'The Writer's Second Life', *Indian Express*, 9 July 2016 <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-writers-second-life-perumal-murugan-tamil-writer-madars-hc-2902172/> [accessed 27 April 2022]; Githa Hariharan, 'A Reward for Mr. Naipaul', *The Hindu* (Chennai, 10 November 2012) <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/a-reward-for-mr-naipaul/article62111229.ece> [accessed 27 April 2022]; Githa Hariharan, 'Mapping Freedom', in *Almost Home: Cities and Other Places* (New Delhi: Fourth Estate, 2014), pp. 74–98.

represented by the obliqueness of her first novel *Difficult Daughters*'s perspective on the Partition) to the impetus of her second novel (to be examined later in this chapter) being borne directly from the Babri Masjid demolition which Kapur describes as 'a terrible shake [that] violated the fabric of Indian society' and condemns personally: 'I was totally against it.'[40] It becomes evident, then, that the authors' own concerns about contemporaneous political conditions begin to manifest within their creative works, thus necessitating the shift away from the confines of the private sphere.

Beyond the authors' personal impetuses, however, there also lies the concern with a necessary redefinition of solidarity in a tempestuous time of marginalisation and violence. If the texts in Chapter 4 allowed for a reading of familial female solidarity within the domestic sphere, in this new era, the 'bourgeois' feminist author follows the configuration that 'the critique of nationalism tends to be expressed by the Indian-English writer in the language of individualism.'[41] The (solely) intergenerational solidarity described in Chapter 4 is thus replaced by a consistent rupture of the domestic bubble as the protagonist ventures alone into the public sphere where her singular political ideology might be manifested through concrete action. Additionally, the text also distances itself from a simplistic interpretation of the term 'solidarity' which reads the domestic as a space that 'is seen to transcend all specifics or rather to blur distinctions in the warm glow of its splendor.'[42] In the context of Hindutva conflict where labels of religion, caste and class supersede gender identities, the category of 'woman' cannot afford to be essentialised to allow representations of solidarity to be read apolitically as 'a personal, subjective empathy that links women to other women and through

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[40] Aasim Akhtar, 'Being Compared to Austen Is an Honour', *The News* (Karachi, 17 August 2014) <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/556872-being-compared-austen-is-an-honour-manju-kapoor> [accessed 5 May 2022].

[41] Sunder Rajan, 'After Midnight's Children: Some Notes on the New Indian Novel in English', p. 206.

[42] George, 'Recycling: Long Routes to and from Domestic Fixes', p. 3.

that to a larger sense of community', and the domestic cannot be painted as a space where 'class barriers are less rigid as maids and the women of the house gather together.'[43]

Thus, while the texts do showcase 'the continuity of a latent pattern of women's alliances' that 'has been a part of Indo-English women's novels', these alliances are no longer permitted a simplistic erasure of the cracks appearing within the category of 'woman' within the public imagination.[44] They instead must reflect these cracks and present attempts at reaching across them in ways that are possible within a heterogenous public sphere, rather than the homologous private sphere. They must read solidarity as 'the collective power that grows out of action in concert', a reading which 'avoids the problems that plague the sisterhood model of solidarity because it is not predicated on an exclusionary and repressive conception of women's shared essence or experience of oppression.'[45]

In doing so, they can espouse a multicultural feminism which 'emphasizes not simply the *range* of culturally distinct gendered and sexualized subjects, but also the *contradictions* within this range, always in hopes of forging alternative epistemologies and imaginative alliances.'[46] The 'feminism without borders' that Chandra Talpade Mohanty theorises is what the texts aim to achieve in tandem with Indian feminisms' own efforts to create the 'most expansive and inclusive visions of feminism' which are 'attentive to borders while learning to

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[43] Chanda, *Indian Women in the House of Fiction*, pp. 36, 85. Chanda's reading of space in bourgeois feminist texts slips into a romanticising of the domestic that erases the class hierarchies embedded within the upper-caste, upper-class home that the texts represent, which highlights the danger of reading decontextualised solidarity in these texts. For example, Chanda's reading of Mayamma in Hariharan's *TFON* (examined in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis) argues that the upper-class home is a refuge for the housekeeper figure who takes on the wifely role that her mistresses fail to fulfil, suggesting a willingness in her inhabiting of the servant role and a solidarity with the upper-class women who escape (110). This reading does not account for the class privilege that allows the protagonist Devi (and her mother-in-law Parvati) to abandon their wifely and motherly duties due to their financial privileges and opportunities. It does not address the economic insecurity and violence outside of the upper-class home that prevent Mayamma's relinquishing of her own duties to secure more independence.

[44] Chanda, *Indian Women in the House of Fiction*, p. 212.

[45] Amy Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), p. 109. Here, Allen is describing an Arendtian theory of solidarity that focuses upon 'the kind of collective power that can bridge the diversity of individuals who make up the feminist movement' (122).

[46] Ella Shohat, 'Introduction', in *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*, ed. by Ella Shohat (New York: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 1–13 (p. 2).

transcend them' through 'acknowledg[ing] the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment that borders represent.'[47] If the Western conception of such a feminism must incorporate a recognition of race, class, and international political and socio-economic hierarchies, an Indian formulation of feminism must take into account class, caste, religion, and language.

As it contemplates the possibilities of an intersectional solidarity in keeping with its political milieu, however, the bourgeois feminist text must also contend with the complexity of its own position. Its sudden, generous, and clearly necessary impetus of activism must be tempered by a severely self-critical reckoning with the privileges of the upper-class, upper-caste position from which each author continues to write, especially now as it strays into the territory of addressing the concerns of women marginalised in terms of religion, caste, class, and language. Moreover, in introducing such marginalised subjects to the narrative in the particular context of their experiences of violent events, the authors must also reckon with the challenge of 'narrat[ing] the unnarratable' in such trauma fiction.[48] The critical debate of representation that Spivak addresses in 'Can the Subaltern Speak', in which it is imperative to address the danger of 'constructing the Other simply as an object of knowledge, leaving out the real Others because of the ones who are getting access into public spaces', becomes newly relevant for these fictional narratives.[49]

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[47] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Introduction: Decolonization, Anticapitalist Critique, and Feminist Commitments', in *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practising Solidarity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 1–13 (p. 2).

[48] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 4. While earlier texts like Deshpande's *DHNT* address trauma as well (and in fact utilise narrative methods elaborated upon by Whitehead, such as a collapse of temporality and chronology, and the use of repetition and indirection (3), to represent trauma in fiction), the public and political nature of trauma focused upon in the 2000s indicates a shift in focus. The marginalised women in these novels are affected not (or not only) by the violence of patriarchal systems, but by the violence of communalism where political forces outside the home cause their trauma, inserting them into a national narrative.

[49] Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak and Sneja Gunew, 'Questions of Multi-Culturalism', in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. by Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 59–66. Spivak's theorisation of alterity and the creation of the Other is particularly central to the arguments of this chapter. In the context of colonisation, Spivak has argued that the coloniser undertakes a 'cartographic transformation' of the colonised land which he understands as 'uninscribed earth' and assigns new meaning to,

In this new political milieu which they attempt to address in their novels, the authors are faced with the challenge of creating an authentic intersectionality in which they undertake the responsibility of uplifting minority voices while attempting not to tread upon them, so that their literary goals of representing a multicultural India (that resists the homogenising impulse of Hindutva) might be achieved. The question remains, however, of how a majority Hindu upper-class, upper-caste novelist might justifiably represent the traumatised survivor of communal violence who is separated from the author's own privileged reality in every possible iteration of identity except gender. A dangerous new complexity in the representation of agency is thus introduced to the canon of the bourgeois feminist text, which this chapter will examine in detail through its literary analysis below.

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The Political 'Bourgeois' Feminist Novel

This chapter's focus on female agency in the context of intersectional solidarity and allyship at a particularly poignant moment within Indian history at the end of the twentieth century

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thus 'mak[ing] the "native" see himself as "other" ('The Rani of Sirmur', 253-54). The gendered alterity proposed in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' is taken further by Spivak in other writings, and her commentary upon the particular inflection of those marginalised in both class and gender terms is useful here. Spivak argues that 'the disenfranchised female in decolonised space, being doubly displaced by it, is the proper carrier of a critique of pure class-analysis. Separated from the mainstream of feminism, this figure…is singular and alone' ('Who Claims Alterity?', p. 273). In the context of literary representation, Spivak has defended the work of activist-writer Mahasweta Devi from accusations of exoticising and denying a voice to the subaltern through highlighting the 'celebration of the [Gramscian] organic intellectual in Mahasweta's work and writing work' ('Translator's Preface and Afterword', *The Spivak Reader*, p. 272) and noting Mahasweta Devi's own role as 'a female organic intellectual of unusual ethical responsibleness' (*ibid*, p. 282) who is marked particularly by her activist struggles on behalf of the very denotified tribes whose members feature in her fiction. It is interesting then to try and situate writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and Githa Hariharan in comparison to this writing; these authors might less easily lay claim to the title of organic intellectual because of the privileged intellectuality they access and the urban, feminist context in which they write. Can their work, when attempting to represent subaltern figures (particularly the Muslim woman), be seen as exoticising, perhaps speaking *for* or *over* this subaltern so that their writing can be 'dismissed…as an exercise by the pessimistic and jaded postcolonial middle class' (*ibid*, p. 271)? Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *History and Theory*, 24.3 (1985), 247–72; Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, 'Who Claims Alterity', in *Remaking History*, ed. by Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani (Washington: Dia Art Foundation, 1989), pp. 269–92; Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, 'Translator's Preface and Afterword to Mahasweta Devi, Imaginary Maps', in *The Spivak Reader: SelectedWorks of Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak*, ed. by Donna Landry and Gerard MacLean (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 267–86.

now brings us to direct engagement with texts that ostensibly fall within the 'bourgeois' feminist canon (simply by virtue of being written by female upper class authors) and present an investment in ideas of the 'national' and the 'political'. The canon's overt engagement with politics does not, of course, find itself restricted entirely to the 2000s. Geetanjali Chanda's study of Indian women's fiction in English identifies Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* (1985), Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road* (1991) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) as texts which place themselves in 'a specific political moment in the larger history of India' and '[disrupt] the national narratives of power and privilege to assert an alternative vision and voice.'[50]

The novels identified in this chapter can be differentiated from these earlier publications in their focus on events of national significance that are specifically connected to Hindutva, namely the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition and the 2002 Godhra riots, both of which Chanda notes in her 2008 study as events 'yet to be addressed by Indian English literature.'[51] While the early texts studied here – Deshpande's *Small Remedies* (2000) and Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* (2003) – deal with the Hindutva concern in a lateral manner, the later novels – Kapur's *A Married Woman* (2003) and Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories* (2009) – engage directly with the aforementioned political events. The chapter thus begins with analyses of the first two texts and their incorporation of an atmosphere of rising religious intolerance within narratives that fundamentally reckon with women's lives and how they navigate their agential capacities in public and private spaces.

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[50] Chanda, *Indian Women in the House of Fiction*, p. 221.
[51] Chanda, *Indian Women in the House of Fiction*, p. 220.

In Times of Siege

In her fourth novel, *In Times of Siege*, published in 2003, Hariharan presents the clearest

articulation so far of the political milieu of the late 1990s and early 2000s within which these

texts are being written, as it notes the familiarity of the words 'fundamentalist' and 'the

made-in-India brand, the communalist – a deceptively innocuous-sounding name for

professional other-community haters.'[52] Hariharan's interest in addressing these concerns at

this particular historical moment is clarified within the novel itself, through characters who

note that religious fundamentalists are 'crawling out of the woodwork now that it's their

season' (30), and through the novel's dedication to 'all those who speak up in times of

siege (v)', among whom the author herself clearly intends to be numbered. The novel is thus

committed to contributing to a collective articulation of dissent against fundamentalist

politics, and it does so through its close examination of the consequences of these politics

within the life of a single character, a university history teacher whose writings about a

reformer-poet come under the scrutiny and attack of Hindutva zealots. The relevance and

necessity of the text's political leanings are clarified in an interview where Hariharan

describes how, in writing the novel, she found that 'reality was snapping at my heels as I

wrote fiction' when 'fundoos' targeted 'the work of two respected historians on India's

freedom movement.'[53]

Closer examination of the narrative through the lens of female agency and spatial

politics, however, hints at the tensions that continue to be embedded within the bourgeois

feminist text's shift towards political conversation. The first instance of such tension can be

marked in Hariharan's choice of a male protagonist for the text. This pattern is established in

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[52] Githa Hariharan, *In Times of Siege* (Gurgaon: Penguin India, 2003), p. 57 All further references to this text will be placed in parenthesis within the body of the chapter.

[53] Reber. The interviewer Nichole Reber also notes how the rhetoric in the text 'sound[s] like [it] could have come from the speeches of Donald Trump, especially for their theocratic and fascist strains,' thus identifying the continued echoes of its political focus within a reality broader than even Indian politics.

the canon through two antecedents of Hariharan's novel, both written by Anita Desai in the 1980s, which also feature male protagonists in politically angled texts, *In Custody* and *Baumgartner's Bombay*. Desai's direct addressal of this shift in focus clearly emphasises the stereotypical gendering of space which affects such choices when she states in interviews that she was 'bored' and 'needed to find more range', which led her 'to write about men in books like *Baumgartner's Bombay* and *In Custody*.'[54] She reifies the binary by stating that 'Men led lives of adventure, chance and risk' and 'I couldn't realistically have women characters just pushing open the doors of the world, so I had to write about men.'[55] It thus seems to be the imperative of these texts to 'bring [their] reader out into the bazaar, into the heat' only through a markedly masculine perspective.[56]

Hariharan's text continues such a rigid segregation in some measure through its focus on the male character Shiv's internal crisis as he grapples with being the target of Hindutva hate politics for his publication, and the narrative confinement of female characters who are automatically rendered marginal, within the private space. Shiv's young ward Meena, while a sociologist and activist, is literally confined to the room by her fractured leg and compared to the protagonists 'of old black-and-white films in which gorgeously dressed upper-class women sit bored to death in their palatial rooms' whose 'only entertainment is looking at the world outside, through the patterns of peepholes cut into the wall' (190). His wife Rekha is also positioned at the domesticated margins of the text as she helps her daughter settle into a

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[54] Anita Desai, Out of India, 2004 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/sep/02/fiction.gender> [accessed 16 February 2021].

[55] Anita Desai, 'Out of India'; Maggie Gee, 'Anita Desai in Conversation with Maggie Gee', *Wasafiri*, 19.42 (2004), 7–11 (p. 9).

[56] Bliss, p. 528. That this is a move welcomed by literary criticism is evidenced by Malashri Lal's approbation of Desai's casting away the 'timid, traditional adherence of what was expected of women writers in India' through these two texts (128). Lal contends that Desai utilises a male perspective and then obfuscates it by 'giving us a constantly retiring, retreating, almost vanishing hero', thus 'dethron[ing] the apparent male centre' (131-32). However, the analysis goes on to suggest that 'he is feminized by his silence, passivity and separation from the mainstream of life', thus utilising a rubric of agency seeped in traditional gender stereotypes. Both Desai and Lal thus rely upon very rigid and conventional ideas of space and gender in their discussion of the appearance of male protagonists within Indian women's writing.

new city (another demarcation of the female private sphere and its responsibilities of mothering that she must undertake) and is present in the text only as a marker of ideal bourgeois wifehood with her calm and poise, and astute management of home and garden, against which Meena's youthful gumption might be contrasted. Thus, in writing a political text, Hariharan defaults to an assumption of male centrality to public debate.

And yet, *In Times of Siege* makes it clear that the text's true political impetus rests with Meena, who hauls politics into Shiv's house as she adorns her room with radically political posters that establish her own affiliation with feminist activism, to make it 'homely'. The home is thus politicised to be read as 'a very real political figure in an extended moment of historical crisis', as its space becomes literally saturated with ideological stances on public issues.[57] In comparison, Shiv inhabits a position of discomfort in '[Meena's] world where a different [political] language is spoken' as 'she talk[s] of causes and street theatre, "gender" and "courting arrest" with the ease of a veteran' (31). This rupturing of a spatial demarcation between private/apolitical and public/political attempts to respond to the aforementioned assumptions of the scope of the 'bourgeois' feminist text. Even though Meena 'lies in bed, her leg encased in fibreglass, she does not seem aware of her powerlessness' (31). The novel's investment in political commentary thus becomes inflected with a concern for gendered agential possibilities that resist the existing rigid framework. It would, however, be hasty to assume that the text is able to easily coalesce its two objectives without certain cracks appearing in the cohesiveness of its gendered representation beyond this commentary on private/public space.

While Meena is presented as a visionary, her contribution to the resistance against Hindutva is reduced to catalysing the reclusive Shiv's political education rather than exercising her own independent agency: 'It is Meena who put this stick in his hand again,

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[57] Burton, p. 5.

coaxed his limping legs in the direction he knew – better than she – must be taken' (194). She

is thus an inciter and organiser, placed firmly in the role of supporting the male protagonist's

nascent resistance, while also remaining within the confines of his home and under his

wardenship for the majority of the text (she does not exit this room until p. 143 of a 200-page

novel). From Shiv's cautious perspective, Meena's potential for activism is radical, 'hungry'

and 'predatory' (119) which contrasts (as mentioned above) to his absent wife's feminine

grace as well as to the more 'appropriate' discourse undertaken by Shiv and his male

colleagues in the Dean's office as they composedly discuss their possible response to the

fundamentalists (71). Meena's fervour is instead sublimated by the text's introduction of

(uncomfortable) undercurrents of romantic attraction between the middle-aged Shiv and

college student Meena, which further undergirds her reduction to a muse for the primary

protagonist who inevitably achieves an arc of progression (as opposed to Meena's stasis,

whose growth within the text is limited to regrowing the broken bone that has caused her

confinement). Despite her political function, thus, Shiv is able to de-fang her radicality and

instead imbue her image and space with connotations of romantic and maternal intimacy. She

is made into '[h]is brief house of reprieve, the comforting calm before the storm' (84), 'his

refuge, this sanctuary from the predatory world outside its walls' (202), and labelled a 'girl-

matriarch' (203).

In this resolute restriction of the agential possibilities of its primary female character,

the text betrays its discomposure in navigating the behemoth task of cogently presenting its

political stance that critiques those in power, while also engaging with the concerns of

gender, space, and agency that are seen as the primary themes of its genre. Smaller instances

of this discomfort are present throughout the novel as its concerted effort at erasing the

private/public border leads to moments of maladroit metaphors and similes. For example, a

domestic worker's tendency to break household items is described as leading to 'a domestic

genocide' (42), while Rekha's aptitude with gardening and home management is marked by 'a look on her face that [Shiv] imagines many of the conquerors of Delhi have shared' (58). Moreover, the conclusion of *In Times of Siege* is no longer able to sustain a simultaneous interest in both private and public concerns, and succumbs to a focus upon the desire and intimacy between Shiv and Meena. The ending thus neglects the text's primary focus upon the very public debate on secular history and Hindutva violence, reducing it to bureaucratic speeches and meetings between men in a university space that present no clear path of resistance to the threats issued by the Hindutva zealots or of resolution in terms of the ban on the book. The very political concerns that form the core of Shiv and Meena's relationship are thus sidelined, bringing this particular 'bourgeois' feminist text back to its expected focus upon that which is stereotypically private and feminine.

Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* thus presents one of the canon's first ventures into commentary upon contemporaneous public concerns with religious fundamentalism and national identity. While it moves beyond the previous texts' intensive focus upon women's physical and emotional interiority, its representations of female agency can be read as affected by the expanse of its canvas and the assumption of male centrality to political debate.

<p align="center">*</p>

In the analyses of texts to follow, the 'bourgeois' feminist novel moves away from a focus upon male characters, instead placing women's relationships with politics at its centre. Deshpande's *Small Remedies* presents a maternal lineage of political involvement while also attempting to engage with religious intersectionality and allyship; Kapur's *A Married Woman* indicates the activist possibilities for a woman located within the conservative patriarchal structure of a joint family in the politically rife atmosphere of Delhi in the months before the

demolition of the Babri Masjid; finally, Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories* directly places its multiple female protagonists in the backdrop of the Godhra riots. Each author presents possible routes for their female characters to navigate agency and resistance within and outside of the home, while the political climate of the country affects these possibilities (both in inciting and restricting their agencies). Each author also differently manoeuvres the literary form of the novel to expand its focus beyond a singular, private, privileged perspective. The analysis here is thus able to study how this newly political canon adapts the aforementioned techniques of daughter-centricity and heteroglossia, and whether it is able to incorporate even more radical forms of intersectionality through its use of narrative form.

Small Remedies

Deshpande's *Small Remedies* engages in a reliable form of sublimation of the public into the private by focusing upon the consequences of a larger political event upon a single individual. It tells the story of a middle-aged woman Madhu afflicted by grief from the tragic death of her son Aditya in the 1992 Bombay bombings and her journey of mourning as she throws herself into constructing the *bildungsromans* of herself, her activist aunt Leela, and the iconoclast singer Savitribai who are placed at the centre of her narrative.

Deshpande's previous protagonists were marked by their return to the ancestral home and afflicted by 'the double gaze of looking backward at their natal homes while looking forward at the marital homes'[58], thus being restricted by their familial associations. In this novel, however, Madhu leaves her marital home for a completely different private space that no longer limits her to a domestic patriarchy – in her professional capacity of a biographer commissioned to write the history of the legendary musician Savitribai, she moves to the town of Bhavanipur to be hosted by a young couple unknown to her and 'become[s] part of

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[58] Chanda, *Indian Women in the House of Fiction*, p. 99.

the life of two strangers.'[59] In this unfamiliar home, Madhu experiences a sense of *unheimlich* or unhoming, as she moves within a space that 'seemed strange, unnerving almost' (10), and is identified by profession rather than her domestic roles, 'You're the writer' (14), 'the writer from Bombay' (16), which she notes is 'an identity so new, so strange, it feels like a disguise' (16). Deshpande thus divorces a woman's inhabiting of private space from the expected associations with motherhood and wifehood, which functions here as a form of protection from grief: 'Here, I'm safe […] Nowhere am I *Aditya-chi-Aai*, Aditya's mother, the identity I've had, the identity I've drowned myself in for nearly eighteen years' (153). Instead, the text presents the possibility of 'families' formed from non-heteronormative and unconventional bonds outside of the patriarchal family structure.

In fact, as Madhu builds her own *bildungsroman* alongside Savitribai's, these unconventional homes visibly proliferate throughout the text. Madhu herself is raised in a motherless family by a father and the retainer Babu who 'is the domestic authority – he cooks and cleans, but he is no mother' (101); upon this wholly masculine family's disintegration, Deshpande moves her protagonist into a secular home where relationships blur boundaries of family, religion, region, and caste. Here, Madhu is cared for by her aunt Leela and her second husband Joe, becoming sister to Joe's son (Leela's stepson) Tony so that their siblingship raises suspicion: 'we can see the doubtful faces, the puzzled looks' caused by 'our names, so distinctive of our backgrounds, our communities. Madhu Saptarishi and Anthony Gonsalves (50). The multicultural home thus makes an appearance in the canon of novels that has so far been identified by the narrow cultural sphere of the Brahmin Hindu household which

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[59] Shashi Deshpande, *Small Remedies* (Gurgaon: Penguin India, 2000), p. 12 All further references to this text will be placed in parenthesis within the body of the chapter.

demanded a clear demarcation of roles within its joint family set-up, and the text is in fact

littered with marriages that breach categories of caste and religion.[60]

Parallel to Madhu's own unconventional family history, the text pivots around her

muse Savitribai's breaking of the Hindu woman's code of conduct when she transitions from

'a young woman who had lived the sheltered life of the daughter-in-law of an affluent

Brahmin family' to an aspiring Hindustani classical vocalist in a strange town, marked by her

temerity in being 'a married Hindu woman, living with a Muslim partner' (38). Over and

over, the text and Madhu reiterate the gravity of this infraction.[61] A similar audacity is

assigned to the aunt Leela who is 'the black sheep of the family. A widow who remarried.

And what was worse, married a *Christian* man' (45). The text thus becomes preoccupied with

the ways in which the private institutions of marriage and family can themselves embody

resistance to the rigid religious boundaries constructed in Indian public life, in order to

project the possibility of a tolerant, secular India at its familial core in ways that are informed

by individual choice and proximity rather than exclusionary, 'innate' ties of blood: as Madhu

states, 'simulate family and it becomes real' (103).

This clearly deliberate departure from the unsparing monotony of the previous novels'

Hindu milieus announces Deshpande's support of a secular idea of India and her critique of

the Hindutva goal of a Hindu nation in a manner that continues the canon's strongly domestic

focus. The constant presence of such interreligious romantic liaisons throughout the texts

studied in this chapter allow the authors to take advantage of the effacing of boundaries

between public and private theorised by sociologists who recognise the ways in which 'the

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[60] The singular edifice of the normative heterosexual nuclear 'basic unit of family life – father, mother and child' (105) present in the text is disrupted by the disintegration of Madhu's marriage to Som and the death of their son in the terrorist bombings.

[61] These include the following comments: 'For Bai to develop a relationship with another man, a tabla player, a Muslim – this must have been not only unimaginable, but the height of criminality' (220); 'Why did she leave her home, and that, with a Muslim lover? A step so great that even today it would require enormous courage. The stuff even movies still hesitate to take on' (166).

[familial] institution has undergone a very significant paradigm shift due to the effect of rapid industrialization, emergence of new technologies with their impact on tradition and culture, and, of course, globalization on both economic and cultural levels' in India over the turn of the millennium.[62] Through this representation of religious hybridity within the private sphere, the novels insert themselves into a decades-old debate regarding secularity in India. The pioneer of Indian secularism, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, envisioned a country where a separation of religion and politics would 'keep religion's emotional and irrational appeal away from the political sphere' in favour of a morality based on a 'scientific temper'.[63] Such secularism has, however, dissipated in a country with 'a dominant public presence of religion', as is made evident by the very rise of political factions such as the BJP that are intimately associated with Hindutva ideology (in fact, even the apparently secular façade presented by the Congress was rent apart by Nehru's daughter Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the Sikh conflict of the 1980s that resulted in her assassination and the massacre of Sikhs in the riots that followed).[64] Chapter 2 has noted how the perceived secularity of Indian feminist organisations was affected by the impact of religious difference upon women's construction of their own identities, and a recognition of the hegemonic Hinduness that permeated apparently 'secular' spaces that became evident due to the co-option of feminist rhetoric by Hindutva-centric 'women's organisations'. The shift within Indian feminism towards both an acknowledgement of religious difference and a celebration of the dissipation of these fault lines through interreligious marriage is thus reflected in this canon of texts that themselves move away from an unacknowledged Hindu-centric narrative to a marked focus upon interreligious romance.

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[62] Dasgupta and Lal, pp. 13–14. The urban milieu in particular has been affected by this shift due to the variety and anonymity introduced by migration patterns, thus creating it as a cosmopolitan and multicultural space.

[63] Sushmita Nath, *The Secular Imaginary: Gandhi, Nehru and the Idea(s) of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 143.

[64] Nath, p. 37.

The novel's aim of participating in public politics through such private familial formations that reflect a new political impetus for hybridity is furthered through its contemplation of motherhood. Madhu's grief as 'a bereaved *mother*' (17) over the death of her son in a distinctly public event politicises her motherhood.[65] Such a political and resistant form of motherhood that harnesses emotion into protest has existed in the Indian public consciousness since 1994 in the form of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) established by Parveena Ahangar in Kashmir as a collective movement led by mothers to question enforced disappearances of Kashmiri youth by Indian security forces, where 'the mothers of disappeared sons and the half-widows of disappeared husbands are a symbol of that wounded yet resistant Kashmir.'[66] Deshpande thus harnesses motherhood as a public identity in a manner that contrasts (rather than strengthens) the stereotypical nationalist use of the mother figure, focusing instead upon the ways in which it can be used to resist the dominant formations of (Hindu) nationhood that are now associated with such violence.

Further, Deshpande's novel also focuses on unravelling the histories of Madhu's two mother figures Leela and Savitribai.[67] However, unlike the texts analysed previously, the spotlight is placed, not on their mothering roles, but upon their iconoclasm in forcing their way into the public sphere at the expense of their reputations. All three mothers within the text are presented as 'failed' mothers in different ways: in Madhu's guilt at failing to protect her son from his tragic death, in Savitribai's erasure of her illegitimate daughter from her

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[65] Nancy Ellen Batty notes the parallel between Madhu and *The Binding Vine*'s Urmi as both are mothers grieving the loss of their child and both find solace through researching and writing about a female lineage of creative resistance. However, while Urmi's grief is caused by her daughter's unfortunate illness, Madhu's loss is marked by the potent injustice of a terrorist bombing in which an innocent child loses his life, thus linking it more directly to the political realm. Batty, p. 152.

[66] Goldie Osuri, 'Reflections on Witnessing with the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, Kashmir', *Feminist Review*, 119.1 (2018), 144–53 (p. 145).

[67] Madhu overtly clarifies the connection she sees between herself and Savitribai in their loss of children – 'I came here to see Munni's mother, the woman who lost her daughter, like I did my son' (283) to the same bomb blasts in March 1992.

story 'when she turned to respectability' (154), and in Leela's participating in an unconventional family where 'Joe and Leela are a couple, but they are not father and mother' (102). And yet, the text's lack of daughter-centricity prevents its criticism of this un-motherliness, thus breaking the pattern identified in the earlier 'bourgeois' feminist novels. Instead, *Small Remedies'* first-person narration from Madhu's vantage point in the metatext is injected with Leela and Savitribai's own first-person recollections of their revolutionary potential on their deathbeds in order to form a complex web of oral histories curated by Madhu that ostensibly replicates the feminist use of oral history 'in the scholarship on subaltern women who are often marginalised as subjects within traditional archives.'[68]

Through its representation of such clearly resistant female characters (old and young), Deshpande's text presents a concerted shift in its relationship with women's agentic capacities. If the analyses of 'bourgeois' feminist texts in the previous chapters of this thesis were obliged to read deeply into the novels' construction of female characters to unearth the complex configurations of resistance present within them, the analysis here is fated to recount the very surface of the plot that brims with more traditional forms of resistance to patriarchal social norms. The nostalgia of this recitation of feminist deeds differs from the nostalgia

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[68] Mahua Sarkar, 'Between Craft and Method: Meaning and Inter-Subjectivity in Oral History Analysis', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 25.4 (2012), 578–600 (p. 586).
In these recollections, Savitribai is identified as the great artist who struggled and sacrificed everything in the cause of her art' (166) and braved the derogatory reputation of 'the singer woman' (29) to achieve these heights, while Leela is celebrated as the 'trade unionist, the activist, the rebel' (283) placed at the very centre of Indian political history through her participation in the Quit India movement in 1942, and the anti-Emergency movement, the all-women anti-price rise campaigns, and the millworkers' strikes in the 70s (thus clearly flouting the expectation of the text's female characters, especially older women, existing at the margins of public, recorded history). On their separate quests, both older women also inhabit homes that are immanently non-patriarchal – Savitribai forms a musical household that is marked by 'a pile of footwear perpetually outside the door' from visitors, an 'air of excitement that emanates from the house', and 'the music that flows out of the house', thus creating it as a professional rather than a private space (31); Leela, on the other hand, remains steadfastly bound to the independence of her chawl, unattached to her natal or marital families, living 'among sooty mills and shit-pocked roads, among men and women who had little beauty in their lives' (320) and in whose aid Leela exerts the majority of her agency. For both author and her protagonist, the writing of such characters is a form of ode to 'all those women who reached beyond their grasp…moving out of their class…breaking conventions…break[ing] out of shackles' (284), in the tradition of works such as Radha Kumar's *The History of Doing* which records Indian feminist history from 1800-1990 through similar narrations of individual and collective female resistance.

examined in Chapter 4 in its relationship to the social and political arenas, where the older women execute their resistances: it is now a clear inheritance of activism and defiance. In this novel, Deshpande thus steers her oeuvre towards the overt feminist agenda that it is exhorted to contribute to. However, such a contribution would not be entirely fulfilled in the text's contemporaneous milieu, if it did not address the era's most prominent political and communal conflicts. The direct documentation of the fundamentalist events connected to Hindutva that tie the novels in this chapter together can thus be attributed to such an impetus. It is this impetus and its success that the analysis will turn to now.

While the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and the ensuing riots and bombings of early1993 determine the path of our protagonist Madhu's life, the feminist oral history distracts Madhu from her bereavement, resulting in the relegation of this event to the subconscious. It remains unaddressed until a cathartic release can take place at the novel's conclusion. In keeping with the genre's smaller focus, this larger event is instead foreshadowed by the forms of difference through which public religious conflict seeps into the quotidian lives of its characters.[69] Deshpande's text thus also sublimates the goriness of communal violence to fit into the familial dynamic, only hinting forebodingly at its culmination in more public and violent events: 'Is this where they came from, those people who ran amok on the streets, hurting, maiming, killing? Planting bombs in buildings, buses and cars, killing the innocent and the young?' (36)

By such sublimation and avoidance of the scene of communal violence, the text's intersectional agenda, so visible in the private sphere's multiculturalism, thus seems to fail in recognising the very public inequalities produced by religious identity, and its brutal

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[69] The conflict is suffused into incidents like the bullying experienced by Savitribai's daughter Munni due to her Muslim father (when she is assailed by comments such as 'Ayya, she's stinking of meat. Did you eat biryani?' (77)), or the familial conflict between Joe's daughter Paula and Madhu which is tinged by religious difference (when Paula abuses Madhu, 'the word 'Hindu' is added to every abuse, as if the prefix adds to the offensiveness' (119)).

consequences. The only way that the novels feels able to account for these consequences is through the extremely intimate grief that Deshpande has assigned to Madhu, experienced within the heteronormative triad of father-mother-son. It is only in this intimate context that Madhu is able to articulate the violence (mentioning 'the riots', 'Babri Masjid', and 'Ayodhya', and the bus bombing (246)) and to undertake a cathartic retelling of the traumatic event that addresses the 'mobs running amok in the city' and the fear that 'lies like a pall above' it (299). On the other hand, when the singular active Muslim voice in the text begins to bear witness to the suffering of Bombay's Muslim population through the post-Babri riots, Madhu actively walks away, choosing instead to sequester herself within her own room (297). Even Madhu's own husband's proximity to the riots, since 'most of his patients are Muslims' (258), is flippantly introduced in the context of the stress of his job, thus centring the majoritarian experience and leading the text dangerously close to the nonchalance of the apolitical privileged 'bourgeois' female protagonist identified with this particular canon of texts, of which feminists have been so critical.

This chapter's concern with agency as allyship, and the fracturing of the essentialist category of 'woman' through a confrontation with contemporary politics, thus must recognise this particular novel's struggle with presenting unequivocal solidarity to the minority in the text – its Muslim characters. In fact, as Nancy Ellen Batty notes, *Small Remedies* continues upon the theme of haunting that is central to Deshpande's oeuvre, not only through the trauma and grief of its central character, but also through extending this 'haunted subjectivity to an entire nation, caught in the grip of a phantasmoric paranoia about the figure of the "good Muslim"'[70] *Small Remedies* introduces three Muslim figures in the text's past and present – Hamidbhai who is identified by 'his nationalist father, his saintly mother, his business acumen, his philanthropy, his patriotism, his simple life etc., etc.' (160); Ghulam

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[70] Batty, p. xl.

Saab, who is identified as the 'devout Muslim' who is also vegetarian and the backbone to Savitribai's illustrious musical career (274); and Savitribai's student Hasina who is marked by her obeisance to her guru, her singing of 'a Devi stotra' (317) and 'a bhajan by Akka Mahadevi' (319) which fulfil the requirement of the Muslim's performance of benign secularism, and her guilt and meekness in the face of violence targeted at her for singing at a Hindu temple as a Muslim woman: she is 'unhappy at the thought of causing trouble' (296). These characters are thus clearly exhorted upon to wear their patriotism and secularism on their sleeves, while the discrimination and violence they face as Muslims remains unarticulated.

The abovementioned misjudged attack by politicians on Madhu, mistaken for the Muslim 'interloper' Hasina in the temple because of her salwar-kameez (296), in fact functions as the only moment of unintended allyship in the text. Here, two Hindu bodies become 'the instrument the men used to send out a message: Hasina can't sing at the temple' (294) and the targeted Muslim body is marked by its regret and guilt at the event: 'Those blows were meant for me' (297). The resolution of this momentary perforation of communalism into the novel's tranquillity points to Deshpande's desired ending for both her novel and the political conditions it is attempting to address. Madhu writes an article to underline the secular history of the singing programme at the temple where Hasina is to perform, and the performance goes ahead without obstacles, functioning as the novel's happy conclusion. This denouement in *Small Remedies* allows both Madhu and Deshpande to uphold writing as a bastion of truth and revolution, proclaiming, 'the word is the flashing sword, the flaming torch, the disperser of darkness and ignorance, the bestower of knowledge' (309).

The very same words, however, when subjected to our analysis here, betray the continued privilege of the silo in which they are written. When recounting the horrors of the

Bombay riots in which she eventually loses her son, Madhu details 'the miasma, the smell of disaster in the air,' and then adds, 'but we are still free of it, still immune to it' (299). This *we*, granted immunity to violence, silently manufactures a *they* who remain unprotected outside the boundaries of the privileged majority. *They* become identified in the passing mention, two pages later, of her husband's (primarily Muslim) patients who make desperate calls to her safe home and ask where he is (301). Madhu, however, is insensate to these pleas, plunged as she is by now into her own grief by the news of her son's death, which the text does not endeavour to integrate into the grief of the many families in the city that lost loved ones (317 casualties were reported from the March 1993 bombings alone, while the riots three months earlier claimed 900 lives).[71]

Deshpande's first novel published in the twenty-first century thus also struggles to imagine a collective feminine agency that is able to straddle its political aspirations alongside the canon's signature focus upon feminine interiority. The novel's access to public discourse is routed through feminist nostalgic genealogy that bears witness to women stepping over the established *Lakshman Rekha* to undertake roles other than motherly and wifely or even daughterly ones. However, it is unable to articulate an experience of politics that differs significantly from its conventionally privileged Hindu upper-class protagonist's. Deshpande is thus concerned with the impact of the 'public' upon a privileged 'private' without underlining how its protagonist Madhu might herself participate in a larger momentum of resistance, whether in the private or the public sphere.

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[71] Chris Quillen, 'Mass Casualty Bombings Chronology', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 25.5 (2002), 293–302 (p. 298); B.N. Srikrishna, *Shrikrishna Commission Report* (Mumbai: Govt of Maharashtra, 1998) <https://www.sabrang.com/srikrish/vol1.htm> [accessed 1 June 2022]. In the realm of fiction, private grief is often presented as a metaphor for public/national grief; it in fact relies upon the introduction of an emotional subjectivity to produce empathy for survivors of a tragic event. Indeed, the texts analysed later in this chapter continue to similarly highlight the plight of a single individual/family to represent the tribulations of a community or nation. The difference being highlighted here, however, is the marginalisation of the voices of victims who are silenced in the dominant discourse, in favour of one that belongs within such a majoritarian discourse.

A Married Woman

Manju Kapur's second novel *A Married Woman* presents, within the texts studied here, the first direct account of the watershed political events that this thesis is concerned with. The novel's *bildungsroman* narration of the conventional life led by Astha Vadera is punctured by the protagonist's introduction to the upheaval that grips her native city of Delhi and the surrounding state of Uttar Pradesh in the lead up to the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1993, which results in Astha's direct involvement in anti-communalist activism. Into this chronicle of the politicisation of the average Indian housewife, Kapur injects another layer of much more intimate politics by introducing romantic desire between women (Astha and another activist, Pipeelika Khan) that attacks the heteronormative foundations of Astha's identity and sense of 'home'. The analysis here straddles the narrative's configurations of both political and sexual agency as they evolve within private and public settings.

The novel's representation of 'home' and its inhabitants presents, in the context of female agency, an interesting regression in the portrayal of older mother figures who no longer serve a purpose in the feminist genealogy of solidarity seen in Chapter 4 and Deshpande's text above; Kapur instead chooses to return them to the function of voicing conservative opinions and to present their agencies as limited to the boundaries divined by heteronormative patriarchy, thus placing them in opposition to the daughter-protagonist's liberal agenda.[72] Astha's mother and mother-in-law both embody the stereotypes closely studied in the texts from the 1980s in Chapter 3, with her mother's almost manic insistence

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[72] This regression is amplified by a return to the daughter-centric third-person narration which privileges Astha's perspective and introduces the older women as circumscribed by their motherly roles, thus moving away from the polyphony that has allowed for a shift in the representation of female agency in other texts studied in this thesis. The only intrusion into this singular perspective is the voice of another young liberal woman, Pipeelika Khan, who goes on to become Astha's love interest. This brief narration is also marked by its placing of younger and older women (Pipee and her mother) at odds with one another across a barrier of social norms.

upon her marriage[73], her mother-in-law's surveillance and critique of her wifely and motherly performances (77-78), and both women's particular desire for a male grandchild (67-68). However, the volatile backdrop of the text which focuses on communal violence assigns new (and dangerous) meaning to these forms of patriarchal agency enacted by traditional mother figures.

Even as Astha acknowledges her mother's social and financial independence from the heteronormative family structure that results from her turn to religiosity (like the Mira figures from the 1980s novels), the event marks a sense of foreboding in the text when juxtaposed with its later focus upon the volatility of religious identity that is brought to the fore by the violence of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement and the consequences of the demolition of the Masjid (96). Further, Astha's mother-in-law's critique of her involvement in politics and of her 'need to leave [her] family' for it is ironically countered by her foisting of her own opinion on the matter upon Astha: 'Hindu tolerance does not mean you accept everything and anything. Is this the pride we have in ourselves?' (186) Thus, the text's configuration of the conflicted mother-daughter relationship is directly implicated within the larger political milieu in which the characters are separated by *political* rather than *personal* differences of opinion. The family itself thus moves from a metaphor for nation, to be marked directly by the divisive lines forming in the public sphere. Here, the 'bourgeois' feminist text no longer echoes, but directly represents, the feminist concern with women's collusion in the Hindutva agenda and particularly assigns this function to the older women within the text who might be more easily negotiated into the role of upholding religio-patriarchal structures.[74]

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[73] Manju Kapur, *A Married Woman* (New Delhi: India Ink, 2002), pp. 20-21;33 All further references to this text will be placed in parenthesis within the body of the chapter.

[74] This confining of the Hindutva agenda to older women in this text, while not representative of the true diversity of women's support for the movement during this time (in age, class, or position within the family dynamic), supports this thesis's hypothesis that the conservative mother figure features as the best candidate in the 'bourgeois' feminist text for a euphemistic portrayal of women's support for the Hindutva ideology and the feminist movement's discomfort with it.

Like Deshpande in *Small Remedies*, Kapur thus clearly utilises the genre's association

with the private and intimate to underline how political delineations seep into the country's

fabric through hegemonic structures such as the family. In representing the relationship of an

urban business-owning family with this political milieu, Kapur is able to highlight the

integration of communalist thought with urbane modernity by addressing the *consumption* of

religion as a commodity, 'at home on one of [Astha's] husband's TVs' (104), that allows

communal virulence to develop through technology as 'the family gathered […] before a

ClearVision TV, twenty-inch screen, manufactured by the son of the house, and watched the

story of the Ramayan', allowing 'the long arm of history [to be] twisted and refracted, till it

popped out of a TV box, took them to Ayodhya and planted them on the Ram Kot in front of

the Babri Masjid' (105). This 'bourgeois' feminist text thus records the pivotal collaboration

between the neoliberal and Hindutva agendas in the 1990s that been addressed in

ethnographies by theorists such as Meera Nanda, Purnima Mankekar and Aravind Rajagopal,

but etches it upon the canvas of the singular familial living room while the ethnographies

draw broader strokes through their focus on a national trend.[75] Kapur's novel therefore

presents the utility of the intimate fictional text in exemplifying the minute shifts in personal

thought and action that crescendos into the public and political movement leading to the

destruction of a 500-year old mosque in a manner that perhaps challenges the accusation of

the genre's sticking to a narrow canvas.

In fact, *A Married Woman*'s aim of creating private space as a battlefield upon which

political differences are articulated continues most specifically within the heteronormative

marital relationship between Astha and Hemant, with the husband embodying both

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[75] Nanda; Purnima Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television,
Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Aravind Rajagopal,
'The Emergence of a National-Popular Television Aesthetics: Surveying in the 1990s Through Advertisements',
in *Pluralism and Democracy in India: Debating the Hindu Right*, ed. by Wendy Doniger and Martha Nussbaum
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 275–328.

misogynist and communalist (Hindutva) points of view. Large swaths of dialogue between the couple involve the husband's reiteration of the stereotypes of female apolitical passivity and his incessant expressions of disapproval at Astha's breaking this expected mould.[76] These stand alongside his condonement of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement's violent objectives and his expression of the complicit majority's disgruntlement with public resistance from minority communities.[77] This conflict-ridden relationship not only demonstrates how the private is suffused with the political, but also underlines the fallacy of the rigid boundaries that both patriarchal and feminist conceptions of space might succumb to (as noted earlier in this chapter). For Hemant, his wife's participation in a protest street play is 'political' ('Why can't you stay at home? And why drag the children into this?' (102)) and he demarcates the spatial boundaries that he expects her to adhere to; however, his own (and his family's) relationship with religion (through watching the *Ramayana* on television, for example) is a matter of personal belief and benign conversation, even in the volatile political environment that is the backdrop of their consumption. Kapur's configuration of the home as political in *A Married Woman* is thus much more radical than Deshpande's in *Small Remedies*, where the focus remained upon personal identity and difference (which might be easily overcome), rather than upon the suffusion of nation and religion throughout private spaces and relationships (which, as Kapur shows, is dangerously deep-rooted).

Such an argument for the inclusion of the study of home and family in canvassing the impact of Hindu nationalism, particularly upon women, is taken further by Kapur through the juxtaposition of the conservatism that marks Astha's home and family life with two other

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[76] He tells Astha, 'Keep to what you know best, the home, children, teaching' (116); 'You seem to forget that your place as a decent family woman is in the home, and not on the streets' (172); '[according to Hemant], I had no sense of home, duty, wifehood or motherhood' and was 'neglecting my family and burdening his poor mother with my responsibilities' (248).

[77] 'What did they expect, that this is the time of the Muslim rulers, where Hindus will sit down and not retaliate?' (297); 'Arre, you want to protest, protest, who is stopping you? Let the ordinary tax-payer lead his life, that's all I ask, but no' (145).

intimate liaisons upon Astha's path to activism that present a clear alternative and embody the Muslim and queer politics of the text, the street theatre artist Aijaz Akhtar Khan and the activist Pipeelika Khan. Kapur's routing of the primary figure's politicisation through romantic interests merits some scrutiny, since it suggests a certain compulsiveness to the text's focus on the private and even, to some extent, minimises its ability to seriously contemplate her ideological formation into an anti-Hindutva activist. In fact, the conservative husband figure identifies this shortcoming in Astha's turn to activism (248). His criticism of her does not register her exposure to the dangers of Hindutva rhetoric, her vehement moral opposition to the violence it embodies, or her desire to prevent the suffering of the minority Muslim population that might have caused her sudden interest in attending protest marches, making speeches or composing persuasive anti-Hindutva pamphlets; instead, it focuses upon her personal relationships with Aijaz and Pipeelika, who have apparently led her astray. The significance of a housewife's transformation into an agentic radical political figure is thus allowed to possibly be reduced to a stereotype of 'the bored housewife's affair' that ruptures the myth of the ideal family simply by introducing a new private romantic formation.

While their introduction as romantic interests could thus be seen as diluting Astha's possible radicality, these relationships also present a strong contrast to the formations of the private sphere presented by Hemant and the mother figures studied above in a manner that, instead of cocooning Astha within the private sphere once again, presents the possibility of a reconfiguration of this intimate space itself. This iteration of the private underlines the possibility of romantic connections that encourage and enable political activism which is clearly unattainable in the traditional Indian household that Astha comes from. Astha's relationship with Aijaz consists of his incitement of her political and creative awakening as she is drafted into his movement to bring awareness to the dangers of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement and to call for peace and secularism through street theatre (113). She is similarly

'flattered by [Pipeelika's] attention and comments' on her politically charged paintings, and declares that to be with 'someone interested in the details of your work is companionship at the deepest level' (260). Thus both private amorous encounters are marked by creative fulfilment and political solidarity, making more stark the continuous dissuasion, criticism and belittlement Astha faces from her husband when her writing, painting or activism are discussed in the home.

Such an argument about the reconfiguration of the private sphere is further bolstered by the queer relationship between Astha and Pipeelika which presents the ultimate threat to the heteronormative, patriarchal Hindu family. Here, Kapur introduces a particularly radical form of private (sexual) agency through the women's romance which '"queers" the traditional spaces of home through non-heteronormative acts that transform domestic, bourgeois space'.[78] The domestic is reframed into a non-hierarchical space of comfort in which the women perform domestic acts for each other (230, 263), and the act of lesbian sex itself is described by Astha as 'making love to a friend instead of an adversary' (231). In addition to the resistance that this desire between women presents to ideas of home and family within the novel, it also presents a larger straddling of both the private and public through Kapur's decision to portray queer women in love.[79] Its inclusion in *A Married Woman* presents Kapur's stance on the very public debate about the legality of homosexuality

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[78] Rahul K. Gairola, 'Capitalist Houses, Queer Homes: National Belonging and Transgressive Erotics in My Beautiful Laundrette', *South Asian Popular Culture*, 7.1 (2009), 37–54 (p. 39).

[79] In the introduction to her doctoral dissertation on the literary representations of lesbian desire in India, Sridevi K. Nair traces a lineage of the presence of queer women from Ismat Chugtai's Urdu short story 'Lihaaf' (1941) and Malayalam author Kamala Das' autobiography (1976) to Deepa Mehta's controversial film *Fire* (1996), Ashwini Sukthankar's anthology *Facing the Mirror: Lesbian Writing from India* (1999), Suniti Namjoshi's *Goja: An Autobiographical Myth* (2000) and two realist historical novels, namely Kapur's *A Married Woman* (2002) and Abha Dawesar's *Babyji* (2005). Kapur's novel thus forms part of a canon of women's writing on female same-sex desire as well as participating in the larger canon of Indian feminist fiction under study here. Sridevi K. Nair, 'Writing the Lesbian: Literary Culture in Global India' (University of Michigan, 2009) <https://www.proquest.com/docview/304927635> [accessed 29 March 2023].

in India, at a time when Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (which criminalised homosexual acts) had not yet been declared unconstitutional by a court of law.[80]

This debate on the queer subject's ability to exercise their sexual agency has primarily centred around spatial politics. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which criminalised homosexual acts was contentious particularly because of its disregard for the Indian citizen's constitutional right to privacy (in order to enforce this law, 'the reach of the prosecutor powers of the law must go into the sacred sphere of the home'[81]), making it an intimate concern that is simultaneously very public. Kapur's novel is able to capitalise upon the haziness of this boundary to represent a desire that is ostensibly private, in a canon that is marked out as concerned with the private sphere, while making a clear public statement in support of LGBTQ+ rights. Through its representation of queer romance, both the text and its characters are thus able to evade binary definitions of 'public' and 'private' that are enforced upon them by a patriarchal, heteronormative establishment (represented in the text by Hemant and the mother figures).

The analysis of this novel has thus far focused upon its representation of the private in both its traditional and radical iterations, through which Kapur seems to argue for the importance of including such complexities in our navigation of the threats that Hindutva poses to the country. In the particular milieu of this text's publication in 2002 (the year of the Godhra train burning and the riots that followed), however, it seems that Kapur's narrative cannot afford to simply resort to subtle (or perhaps feeble) attempts at renegotiating the boundaries of 'private' and 'public' within which female agency can be enacted, without also incorporating an activist agenda of radical proportions that necessitates some form of

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[80] The Delhi High Court first ruled against the section in 2009. Reuters Staff, 'Delhi High Court Overturns Ban on Gay Sex', *Reuters* (London, 2 July 2009) <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-40752720090702> [accessed 12 July 2022].

[81] Shivang Tandon and Aditi Srivastava, 'Various Aspects of Decriminalising Homosexuality in India', *Supremo Amicus*, 3 (2018), 530–43 (p. 532).

retrenching those same boundaries, so that the text can be seen to make a clear, unequivocal political statement. In pursuit of this goal, we find the protagonist Astha being swept into the eye of the political storm through her travel to Ayodhya (190) and the Babri Masjid, her participation in rallies (143), vigils, protests (171) and political yatras that aim to unify the country (246), all taking place, of course, in the public streets, which is another first for a text within this canon.[82]

It is in the light of this clear perforation of the *Lakshman Rekha* to focus upon public political concerns (even within the space of the home) that the representation of maternal figures and their agency in the text can more clearly be scrutinised. It becomes possible to ask whether the older women's conservatism noted above, and their allegiance to stereotypical patriarchal boundaries and mores, are perhaps necessitated by the need to contrast against Astha's public resistance. Are these older women returned then to the position of foils whose personal and public politics cannot be reconciled with, leaving a widening chasm between generations of women that no longer allows for benign forms of intersectional solidarity? The introduction of political leanings into the family home necessitates (for both text and daughter-protagonist) a recognition of the manner in which the older women's personal beliefs and practices (considered apolitical so far) now reflect in the public sphere across a clearly drawn ideological split between the secular liberal and the religious Brahminical conservative.

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[82] The only iteration of a 'private' form of individual female agency within the text is in fact Astha's own creative agency through painting and writing pieces that are inspired by political events (for example, her street play about the history of the Babri Masjid (107), her pamphlets for the Sampradayakta Mukti Manch (215-6), and her paintings of monumental events, such as the Rath Yatra which escalated the Masjid matter (157), which are sold to raise funds for the anti-Hindutva movement (149)). However, these creative projects are undertaken not just in the private space, but within her solitary room, a 'space that was hers and hers alone' that she can shut and lock to wrench 'uneasy privacy' from her family and the responsibilities it places upon her (156). The novel's understanding of female agency within the private sphere is thus concerned with the feminist requirement of a Room of One's Own. Such a formation of the 'private' shifts away from the orientation *towards* family and home that we have seen in the canon so far, instead highlighting seclusion and separation from it, thus re-etching the necessity of the political female subject's separation from the domestic.

In this volatile atmosphere, the subtlety of the nonconformity or solidarity expressed in the texts studied in previous chapters no longer suffices and is replaced by more conventional forms of 'radical' resistance. Scrutinising the spatial boundaries drawn in the text thus helps identify the large shift in the portrayal of female agency in the 'bourgeois' feminist novel in this moment of political crisis. Identifying this shift also allows us to question whether an unequivocal movement into the public, and an abandonment of the 'private' structures of family and home that are now marked by wilful ignorance of and/or collusion with nationalist patriarchal politics, is truly able to account for the complexities of female agency in a manner that recognises the possibility of resistance itself as a small quotidian act alongside its usual iteration as a large show of public protest.

In keeping with movement away from intergenerational solidarity towards a widened focus on new and unquestionably more important forms of intersectionality, the novel also continues the canon's newfound focus upon interreligious marriage and the introduction of Muslim characters, as in Deshpande's *Small Remedies*. For these texts and their authors, the inclusion of religious diversity unequivocally declares their support for a secular India and forms the most important form of protest against Hindu nationalism. Just like in Deshpande's *Small Remedies*, however, this inclusion in Kapur's *A Married Woman* does not necessarily indicate adequate representation that is able to move beyond trite stereotypes such as the exoticisation (136) and eroticisation (129) of the Muslim zenana, the representation of the Muslim family as incorrigibly conservative in its rejection of interreligious marriage (which presents a decisive contrast to the Hindu mother's begrudging acceptance of her Muslim son-in-law (134-36)), and, most importantly, the representation of Aijaz Akhtar Khan as a Muslim activist who is reduced to the function of patiently educating Hindus while tolerating their bigotry (132; 110) and inciting them into action in a manner that centres the Hindu's education into allyship over the Muslim experience of discrimination and violence. We thus

return to the trope of the 'good Muslim' devoid of anger which has been examined in Deshpande's text above.[83]

Such analysis of the trend of Muslim representation in the 'bourgeois' feminist text (that continues also in the next and final analysis of Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories*) clearly indicates the struggle faced by the upper-class Hindu female author who, despite her best intentions, is restricted by the majoritarian perspective that surrounds and beleaguers attempts at adequate representation. This issue raises an urgent question that returns to the concern with *vertreten* and *darstellen* (that continues to be asked in various contexts today, from academia to popular culture, and remains unanswered): is tokenistic representation that resorts to stereotype better than complete erasure from mainstream culture? Can we afford to applaud the bare minimum effort at diverse representation while the political milieu is marked by a concerted effort to expunge minorities? Should this representation exert itself to encompass the reality of discrimination or can it get away with creating an idyllic utopia that erases the violence borne by the minority?

Ultimately, it is clear that Kapur's *A Married Woman* sets a precedent for women authors writing in English from the particular perspective of upper-class urban India in its attempt at direct engagement with India's political circumstances in the early 2000s, through witnessing and recording its manifestations in both the private Hindu home and the public streets of India, particularly in Delhi and Ayodhya. The demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1993 necessitates the text hurtling to the same dystopian conclusion, bound as it is by reality; it therefore cannot project a naïve utopian ideal of secularism and instead forces its protagonist and reader to face the grim reality of the consequences of religious divides. The

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[83] The binary of the 'good' and 'bad' Muslim was first elucidated by Mahmood Mamdani in the context of 9/11 and the shift in perception of Muslim citizens in the US and UK. In the Indian context, it has specifically denoted the consistent pressure on the Muslim Indian citizen to 'prove their loyalty' to India, which requires an avatar that does not betray negative attitudes towards the state or towards the Hindu majority, instead portraying a steady belief in the Indian nation's secularism. Mahmood Mamdani, 'Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism', *American Anthropologist*, 104.3 (2002), 766–75.

novel's only medium of providing hope is in its fictionalised eyewitness account of the resistance (particularly by women) to the battering of a secular idea of India, which already existed before the demolition of the Masjid and gains momentum in its aftermath. Kapur also records resistance through art itself, in the street theatre performances led by Aijaz (whose characterisation seems inspired by the real-life revolutionary street playwright and director Safdar Hashmi, who was murdered in the midst of a play performance in 1989 and remains a symbol of resistance within the Indian theatre scene), and in the novel's critique of the Hindutva establishment through a feminist lens, a task hitherto unaccomplished within the canon.[84]

This direct engagement with political events allows *A Married Woman* not only to represent the forms of creative resistance that might be used in response to nationalist and communalist agendas, but also to evaluate their (and the novel's own) efficacy as mediums of protest. Characters like Aijaz and Pipeelika bring with them criticism of the privileged enclaves within which the upper-middle class protagonist stages her protest and a questioning of whether these mediums might effectively dismantle hegemonic structures, whether that be patriarchy, heteronormativity, nationalism, or communalism.[85] It is a question that the text leaves unanswered (unless the demolition of the masjid might be read as providing an answer in itself – a clearly critical one), but in raising the question, Kapur is able to underline the primary concern for 'bourgeois' feminist fiction as a whole: what can the creative agency of the Indian woman writing from her privileged urban upper-class, upper-caste home achieve when it confronts the sweeping threat of nationalist politics? How can this author and her text

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[84] Later texts by women writers in English that begin a sustained critique of the BJP and its Hindutva agenda include Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) and Nayantara Sahgal's *Day of Reckoning* (2015), *When the Moon Shines by the Day* (2017) and *The Fate of Butterflies* (2019).

[85] Aijaz directly asks the question, 'What is the use of confining oneself to the middle classes where it is safe – safe and cowardly?' (137) while Pipeelika is critical of the Sampradayakta Mukti Manch, run by upper-class female activists, which does not challenge the government or demand justice, instead focusing on 'hold[ing] exhibitions, rais[ing] money and indulg[ing] in cultural nonsense' which are dismissed as 'elitist' methods of protest that only involve 'preaching to the converted' (182; 203)

establish their opposition to such politics, and position themselves as aligned with marginalised communities without Othering them or speaking over them? In fact, what does fiction achieve through creating possibilities of allyship and resistance, and who has the authority to write such allyship into existence? Can the language of radical resistance be incorporated both into the novel as well as the act of its creation? This thesis argues that in its representation of female agency and the attendant concerns with spatial politics, Kapur's *A Married Woman* thus opens a path for deeper contemplation of the manner in which intersectionalities of class, caste, language, or geography affect the forms of agency available to women and the possibilities they have to enact them.

Fugitive Histories

Our final text to be analysed, Githa Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories*, marks a culmination to the novels studied in this chapter that were published in the 2000s, in its configuration of spatial politics and female agency that moves a step further from what the canon has achieved so far. Its inclusion in this chapter also portends that it betrays a number of similarities to the Deshpande and Kapur's texts, thus allowing a thematic examination of the patterns visible in texts published in this decade to excavate a common concern amongst urban 'bourgeois' feminist authors to showcase an investment in the political and to present a cosmopolitan cast of characters.

Hariharan carries forward the focus upon women's witnessing and recording of political events that cause seismic shifts in the cultural landscape within which the novel is published: *Fugitive Histories* places the spotlight upon the Godhra riots of 2002, which took place in the state of Gujarat and in which 150,000 people were displaced and over 1000 were

killed, with Muslims being the most affected by the violence.[86] In this fictionalised account of witnessing and recording, Hariharan comes closest to emulating the real fact-finding missions organised by feminist organisations in the aftermath of the violence (some of which have been referred to in Chapter 2).[87] Through this emulation, Hariharan is able to centre two important subjectivities, that of the witness (documentary filmmaker Sara who travels from Mumbai to Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat which saw the worst bouts of violence) who is positioned similarly to the feminists arriving from urban cities and of the survivor (17-year-old Yasmin who is marked by her personal experience of the violence, displacement and loss through mourning her brother who died in the riots, dealing with the trauma of surviving a rape attempt, and attempting to adjust to life as a refugee in her own city after being driven out of her ancestral family home).

Hariharan's own summary of the text highlights a focus on the possible allyship and solidarity between these two characters across the cracks forming in society: '*Fugitive Histories* probes the ways in which people are divided by prejudice. But the same stories also suggest the possibility of crossing borders in modest but hopeful ways' such as the 'com[ing] together' of Sara and Yasmin.[88] Through this allyship, Hariharan's text is able to engage intimately with the consequences of the violence for the Muslim community, embodied in Yasmin and her family, a clear first for the canon that has so far restricted itself to centring upper-caste Hindu subjectivities, standing alongside its contemplation of women's relationship to public and private space in the context of this violence.

Like its predecessors studied in this chapter, *Fugitive Histories* also harnesses the canon's focus upon the private and the familial to represent multiculturalism through the

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[86] Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 1.

[87] Bina Srinivasan and others; Dutt and others; Rege, Diwakar, and Tambe.

[88] Githa Hariharan, 'Crossing Borders', *Wasafiri*, 24.3 (2009), 29–32 (p. 29).

interreligious marriage of Sara's parents Mala and Asad. In this marriage, the text forces the Hindu woman into the path of religion-based discrimination as the façade of multicultural tolerance in both her family and the community fades away to be replaced by objections ('How can you want to marry him? […] Think of the difference!'[89] (69)), stereotypes, and her children's being bullied in school because they eat meat and have a Muslim father (20). It also forays into the hitherto unexplored avenue of representing a specifically Muslim private space in the first section of the novel; however, the refraction of this representation through the Gaze of the Hindu Brahmin daughter-in-law can clearly be scrutinised for its capacity to once again Other the Muslim woman inhabiting this space.[90] We are able to question the reasons for the presence of such tokenistic representation in the 'bourgeois' feminist novel – Does the author's own position as a woman belonging to the majority Hindu community explain the hesitation with 'speaking for' Muslim experience? Does the repeated use of the Hindu female subjectivity as the focal point through which the Muslim subjectivity is introduced become a tool to interpellate the majority Hindu reader of the 'bourgeois' feminist text in a manner that produces empathy rather than alienation with the Muslim character? Does such a reliance upon tokenism further or hinder the text's aim of celebrating secularism in order to challenge the Hindu nationalist agenda of homogenisation?

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[89] Githa Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2009), p. 69. All further references to this text will be placed in parenthesis within the body of the chapter.

[90] The text seems to replicate the exoticisation of the Muslim home and family that was highlighted in Kapur's *A Married Woman*, with its use of tropes and images that stereotype Muslims petrified in an image of the dark and elusive zenana (or harem) – this home is the space where Mala tastes meat for the first time, where the 'shami kababs are crumbling in the frying pan' and 'the room [is filled] with the heady fragrance of khus', a space populated by 'sherbet -filling daughter[s]-in-law' and the 'elegant lad[ies]' who keep an eye on their large joint family (65-66). In this enclosed space, the Hindu woman is placed as the tourist as well as the defender (to the larger public) of the space, functioning then as an interlocuter, 'an expert on foreign customs, explaining the eating of meat, the offering of namaz five times a day' (73). Mala's role as translator and representative of the Muslim home is interestingly reminiscent of the position that Cornelia Sorabji is assigned in Antoinette Burton's study of Sorabji's work in the zenanas of the early twentieth century, where Burton recognises the manner in which Sorabji's own agency relies upon the passivity assigned to the *purdahnashin* women against which her self-construction as a 'roving and privileged Practitioner of the Law' is contrasted (82). Burton in fact specifically labels Sorabji as 'a tourist who surveys the landscape for sights of vanishing authenticity', thus utilising the same language of exoticisation that is evident in Mala's relationship with her marital home.

In Hariharan's text, redemption from this narrow agenda is found through the concerted use of polyphony through a focus on multiple subjectivities that are particularly helpful in realigning the gaze that restricts the first section. The narrative in fact intermingles and shifts without warning between four different voices that inhabit different positions in society and showcase a different relationship with spatial politics and agency. The text begins with Mala's *bildungsroman*, within which is introduced her grandmother Bala's voice. It then gravitates towards the voice of Sara, who is a more hybrid construction than her foremothers and whose foray into the political sphere introduces the voice of Yasmin. In this arrangement, the grandmother Bala functions as the trope of restricted female agency in the context of patriarchy, positioned as she is as 'the real inmate, a prisoner for her own good' who is 'subject to a mysterious women's ailment called hysteria' that leads to her being jailed in the storeroom by the villainous grandfather (15). Mala, as seen above, functions as a tourist in a hitherto unaccessed private space through her marriage, while also bearing the onus of creating a secular idea of 'home' with her interreligious nuclear family. Sara's function in the text primarily encompasses the public and political, which she undertakes from the modern urban space of her shared PG (paying guest) room in Mumbai (39). Finally, Yasmin, as we see later in the analysis, is forced by political circumstances to abandon her idyllic home-space to instead live in a limbo without a sense of belonging.

The use of polyphony is thus able to enhance the intersectional agenda of the text, to prevent its coagulation into a solely upper-caste Hindu perspective, and to contemplate the possible solidarities for these disparate identities. Bala offers Mala solidarity through a recognition of their resistances: '"You and I beat them," she gloats. "You married *him*. I couldn't escape this place but I've lived longer than that old bastard boss. We've won"' (76). Sara offers her privilege as an aid for Yasmin to escape the constrictions placed upon her as a Muslim girl in Ahmedabad, offering to pay for her college expenses so that Yasmin might

'climb the wall that hides them, maybe look at the other side' (226). The agential possibilities for these women are thus intertwined through the aid that they can offer each other.

The value of such juxtaposition and intermingling of various subject positions that women inhabit within society, and their cross-sectional solidarity, is most convincingly valorised through Sara's hybridity. As the daughter of a Hindu-Muslim couple dating a Christian man, Sara wears all the different names and religious identities dominant in India, and this hybridity becomes her refuge: 'Sara Zaidi could become Sara Vaidyanathan, take a break from one half of herself and try out the other. Or she could leave herself behind entirely, turn into Sara Shaw' (39-40). This form of cosmopolitanism embedded within the protagonist's identity and inheritance creates the possibility of empathy that moves beyond simply placing the protagonist in the *vicinity* of it (as Madhu in *Small Remedies* and Astha in *A Married Woman* are, while themselves being 'whole' in their Hindu identity). Alongside a celebration of the convergence of these apparently opposed identities of Hindu and Muslim, such hybridity also emphasises the fact that it is Sara's mixed identity, as well as her class privileges as an urban educated woman, that play an important role in protecting Sara from attacks that a singular, rigid Muslim identity would have led her to face, thus allowing her to traverse public space safely and undertake the role of an activist. The novel then presents a secular, hybrid identity as not only a sign of societal progress through a movement away from ethnonationalism, but also a form of safeguarding for the individual.

The advantages of this hybridity are starkly presented through a comparison to those who are victimised for their Muslimness, the representation of which marks a strong departure from the scope of the genre so far, with it being the first instance in which Muslim subjectivities are foregrounded, with an unerring focus upon their tribulations caused directly by Islamophobic violence in Gujarat. The narrative does not flinch away from the goriness of the experience of witnessing 'fathers, mother, sisters, brother, *people*' turned into 'monstrous

discoloured lumps of flesh, bloated, burnt or cut to pieces' (137). Instead the novel allows

space for the women to come together to 'tell each other what happened to them, to their

families, their neighbours, again and again' so that they 'fill up every inch of the place with

what they can remember and what still lives with them' (154), thus emphasising a concrete

sense of Muslim female solidarity that becomes the grounds upon which communal healing

can begin.[91] This radical shift in representation is particularly interesting in how it is able to

reconfigure ideas of space and female agency when the context shifts away from the urban,

upper-class, upper-caste Hindu woman who has navigated these concerns so far.

While the cataclysmic violence in 2002 resulted from public political and religious

conflict, one of the primary means of violence used in the public battle was the destruction of

the private – of Muslim homes. Hariharan emphasises the purgatorial homelessness enforced

upon the Muslim community of Ahmedabad as Sara ventures into the refugee settlements at

the edges of the city where '[t]he houses look like they've been built by children or by crazy

adults. Or by people desperate enough to hope that scraps of tarpaulin and canvas or sheets of

plastic and filthy cloth will make a roof over their heads, and a few poles, bricks and stones,

even some stray crates and old tyres, will keep this roof standing in place' (120-21). The

Muslim women's experience of the very private space that has been central to arguments

about female agency is thus marked as starkly different: it is 'a pretend home' (150), a space

where they feel like 'prisoners in [their] own city' (164), a space in which they experience

grief and homesickness for a 'home' that has been destroyed (125). If the ancestral homes of

the Hindu Brahmin protagonists so far symbolised both entrapment and a search for origins,

the ancestral home of Yasmin is instead marked by its vulnerability as a space which is burnt

down (137) and where her bodily autonomy is challenged by a marauding Hindu neighbour

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[91] The room itself is cramped with women enunciating their trauma, and the text dedicates 15 pages to their conversation (152-166).

(138), a space which was marked by the disappearance of her brother, the resulting police harassment (133-34), and ominous threats issued by the neighbourhood (138). Instead of the solidity of its foundations upon which a sense of identity can be built, this ancestral home is marked by 'its structural vulnerability, enabling it to stand not just as a nostalgic symbol of what was but as a silent and accusatory witness in the present.'[92]

Fugitive Histories's portrayal of uprooted Muslim lives allows it to examine how, when approached with an intersectional lens, the concepts of female agency and resistance, as well as women's navigation of spatial politics, are bound by their negotiations with multiple discourses beyond gender, such as religion, politics, communalism and ideas of nation. Muslim women in these dire circumstances are represented by Hariharan as exercising agency in rebuilding their own and their families' quotidian private lives after the public cataclysm. Yasmin's mother expends her energies 'to comfort Abba, comfort Yasmin, comfort herself, make a pretend home in the place they have managed to get' (144). This rebuilding function that women undertake prevents the 'private' from signifying stagnation (or origin) and instead becomes a symbol of resistance that emphasises their resilience.

Simultaneously, Hariharan underlines that Muslim women's movement in and into the public sphere does not symbolise 'freedom'. Public space itself, in these circumstances, becomes fragmented and requires Yasmin 'to learn every map as it shows up on the skin of the city like a birthmark […] has to divide the map into places she can be in, places she can't be in' (147). In this particular conflict, entire public arenas become divested with private forms of identity: the space that Yasmin grew up in is forced to 'become a Hindu locality over the years, a *Hindu neighbourhood*, as if the soil and air, the bricks and cement and trees, have themselves turned Hindu' (127). The women's relationship with both the public and

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[92] Burton, p. 108. Burton makes this comment in the context of another Muslim home in a text, namely Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* in which the ancestral home witnesses the Partition and the resulting disintegration of the Muslim family.

private is stripped of any semblance of choice. Yasmin's mother's decision to become a seamstress and earn money is marked by necessity: 'She needs all her energy to work, work, work so she can send Yasmin back to school, pay for Abba's medicines' (144). The agency embedded in Yasmin's own goals of education and future professional commitments is tempered by her obligation to become both the daughter and the son in the family and provide for her parents (116). Both Yasmin and her mother's engagement with public forms of work and goals of financial independence do not allow their co-option into a linear narrative of 'feminist liberation' when placed in the context of their identities as Muslim women.

Thus, Hariharan's novel more successfully represents the true heterogeneity of the canvas of female subjectivity and agency by harnessing hybridity and polyphony as tools of representation. *Fugitive Histories* emphasises the necessary negotiation of labels and discourses that in itself constitutes the central agential function that women undertake, whether that is Mala's Muslim mother-in-law's negotiation with religious discourse to gain 'the right degree of matriarchal dignity' (65), Mala's own mother's negotiation between religious and patriarchal discourses to perform her role as 'a good mother-in-law, the kind who knows that even a Muslim son-in-law should have the last word' (32), or the negotiations undertaken by the four primary female characters foregrounded in the analysis above. Even as it flits between these various subjectivities, the text remains self-reflectively aware of the pitfalls of hybrid representation through the singular voice of the 'bourgeois' feminist author, which it injects into Sara's narrative as she comments that 'it seems a dangerous thing to do, this going inside someone [b]ecause all along there's a nagging little voice asking, "Can your voice ever be theirs? And who are you to speak for them?"' (191-92). Hariharan in fact records her own concerns with such *speaking for* in her final

acknowledgements where she clarifies the source of the material used for the Muslim experiences included in the text:

> I felt it was best to speak for those affected by the Gujarat catastrophe in 2002 in words as close as possible to their own […] despite the inevitable layers of translation, what they say is based on what I heard during a visit to Ahmedabad in 2004, and read in numerous reports from 2002 onwards. (243)

This clarification is followed by a list of 12 sources of reports ranging from *Communalism Combat*'s reporting at the time, to journal articles and edited collections of eyewitness accounts and activist reports.

The bourgeois feminist text thus remains, at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, invested in representing female agency while expanding its canvas to overcome the accusation of its interiority, not simply through an exodus into the public sphere, but through a perforation of the rigidly drawn boundaries between the 'public' and the 'private' to recognise instead identity formations that must negotiate between the varied discourses that directly constitute them. While recognising the many arenas within which the canon can improve upon its representation (particularly in moving past tokenistic, exoticised Muslim spaces and identities), we might yet credit the genre and its authors for the clear stand undertaken by its texts on matters of national importance while yet foregrounding the heterogeneity of experience and of female resistance in both the public and private spheres.

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Conclusion

In Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories*, the protagonist with the most hybrid identity, Sara, contemplates her complex ancestry inherited from her Hindu Brahmin mother and atheist, secular Muslim father as she travels to Delhi, but is forced to place these nomenclatures aside to focus specifically on her femininity once she has arrived in the city. Hariharan notes that, 'for the moment, all Sara can be is a woman, she has no name or religion or race or caste or

native land. She's nothing but a young woman with a body' which must protect itself against sexual harassment in a public space (180). This scene from the text stands well as a metaphor for the juggling that the novels examined in this chapter engage in, as they navigate between their feminist concern with women's manoeuvring of patriarchal structures that restrict their agencies and resistances, and the fissures within the monolithic identity of 'woman' introduced by the critical inclusion of other discourses of class, caste, religion, and nation with which women must negotiate.

This chapter has critically analysed the success of such juggling, particularly focusing upon how each text manoeuvres the representation of secular family structures, of political events themselves, of minority characters, and of female agency in the context of these concerns, and in doing so, has highlighted their reconfiguration of the spatial politics associated with the genre of 'bourgeois' feminist fiction in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The texts studied here have clearly showcased the rupture caused by increasing communal violence in the themes that upper-class, upper-caste, English-speaking and urban Indian women choose to address within their fiction, within which is evident the more general concern among the Indian liberal population on the correct manner to use their privileged positions to help those marginalised by dominant Hindutva ideology (through concerted allyship), and the necessity of developing new forms of solidarity across boundaries of class, caste, religion, region, and language in ways that do not erase heterogeneity and offer more complex solutions to the issues of women's patriarchal subordination. By highlighting the class positions of both author and text, the chapter has thus questioned whether these affect the novels' ability to effectively portray intersectionality and allyship, and whether the *failure* to produce adequate minority representation indicates a failure to battle the singularity of the ideas of 'nation' and 'woman' that have been created by Hindu ethnonationalism over the last two decades in India. Shedding new light on the novels,

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the analysis has highlighted the danger of such tokenistic representation in the hope that the genre's nascent steps towards the extension of its focus beyond the upper-class, Brahmin Hindu household might slowly develop into a capacity to portray complex characters from Muslim and DBA communities (the possibility of which is clearly visible in *Fugitive Histories*, and in Hariharan's extensive research that allowed for such rounded characterisation). The aim for this canon of fiction that this chapter has identified is thus to continue to reduce the disparity that Linda Alcoff noted between the intention and effect of representation, where 'though the speaker may be trying to materially improve the situation of some lesser-privileged group, the effect of her discourse is to reinforce [dominant ideologies] and perhaps also to further silence the lesser-privileged group's own ability to speak and be heard.'[93]

Finally, the chapter has also questioned whether the canon's understanding of female agency, that has hitherto included subtle negotiations with discourses of femininity and motherhood (as seen in previous chapters) and manifested itself through *refusal* and *solidarity*, is divested of its complexity through the introduction of national political concerns. As demonstrated, the answer has varied across the texts, but has largely showcased a continued interest in the complexities of female agency as manifested in both private *and* public spheres, with the shift entailing an expansion of the discourses that female characters are negotiating with, rather than a reductive or unnuanced representation of their agential capacities. The chapter has concurrently examined the shifting meanings assigned to 'public' and 'private' battlegrounds upon which agency is enacted by these female characters over the three decades in which the texts studied in this thesis were published. If Partha Chatterjee's ground-breaking reading of the private sphere in the colonial period identified the rigidifying of boundaries so that the 'woman question' was addressed solely within this agentic private

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[93] Linda Alcoff, 'The Problem of Speaking for Others', *Cultural Critique*, 20 (1991), 5–32 (p. 26).

sphere in the early twentieth century, the chapter's analysis of this canon of texts has identified how, for the New Indian Woman of the twenty-first century, the imbrication of her identity within new economic and political concerns has necessitated her negotiation within both the 'public' and 'private' arenas to establish the intersectionalities of her identity and to negotiate between them in order to identify her position and its attendant resistant possibilities. This New Indian Woman (represented in both author and her character) thus answers the feminist call to march in political solidarity, while also paying attention to the complex configurations of 'home' and 'identity' that must be examined in order to understand one's position in an intersectional movement of resistance. Thus, through its analysis of texts, the chapter has established the possibility of reading 'bourgeois' feminist fiction for more than the private musings of a cloistered, privileged woman, and to instead utilise the framework of 'everyday resistance' to harness the infinite resistant possibilities embedded within characters in these texts, whether central or peripheral to the narrative.

Since Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories* was published in 2009, a number of texts in the canon as well as other forms of popular culture have continued to question and navigate concerns regarding female agency and resistance in the context of Hindutva, particularly in the context of the disquieting magnitude of its resurrection through the 2014 and 2019 General Elections. The conclusion of this thesis will briefly examine the newly energised anti-Hindutva impetus within feminist circles and the attendant shifts in the representation of female agency and resistance in Indian women's fiction.

Conclusion: Female Agency in the 2010s/2020s

'I was the darling of the Indian middle class [but] keeping quiet was as political as saying something' – Arundhati Roy[1]

In the above interview with Charlotte Sinclair, Arundhati Roy (arguably the most successful Indian female author writing in English) identifies the shift in her roles within national conversation, from the ideal representative of the aspirations of the urban Indian middle class through her international fame and monetary success (in particular, the £500,000 advance she received for her first novel *The God of Small Things* (1997)) to the radical revolutionary 'writing excoriating political essays illuminating the corruption of the Indian government and the human cost of the country's race to modernity.'[2] Roy's is then clearly one of the more transparent trajectories of female upper-class novelists writing in English whose work took a political turn. The manner in which Roy moves towards political commentary differs of course from the more subtle politics embodied in the novels and authors this thesis has examined so far.

Unlike Roy's movement into political non-fiction, the authors studied in this thesis have maintained their employ of fiction and utilised their depictions of private space and family structures to contemplate politics, particularly through the forms of agency available to women who inhabit different positions within a hegemonic patriarchal, Brahminical discourse. This thesis has highlighted mother-daughter dyads, and the shifts that take place in this core relationship over three decades of writing, as the primary signifier of the ideological

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[1] Charlotte Sinclair, 'Arundhati Roy: Why Happiness Is a Radical Act', *Vogue Magazine*, 27 July 2017 <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/arundhati-roy-interview> [accessed 9 February 2022].

[2] Sinclair. Roy describes herself as 'no longer the fairy princess' in this interview.

changes within Indian society, whether that is in women's relationship to religion or economy, nationhood or politics.

In its analysis of the novels published in the 1980s and 1990s, it has underlined the forms of agency available to an older generation of women while also attempting to rupture the formed expectation of the mother figure having 'to be an apolitical, non-threatening, neutral being devoted exclusively to maintenance – who would eschew outside interests and devote all her energies to the family and children.'[3] It has uncovered the parallels in this late twentieth century domesticised mother figure's representation to the pre-Independence drive (as theorised by Partha Chatterjee) to read the home as a space of national significance, with its core residing in the bosom of the 'authentic' Indian woman, as the nation (and its daughters) grapple with seismic shifts caused by neoliberalism and Hindutva.[4]

However, in the 2000s, the thesis has noted a clear shift within the genre towards addressing the political milieu directly (while conserving a certain centring of its impact upon private spaces) and presenting a concomitant move towards portraying more overt forms of agency and resistance that are available to women particularly in the public sphere. This shift has been hypothesised as resulting from a recognition of and an attempt to disrupt the bourgeois and privileged location of the genre, as well as a response to the need of the hour, given the worsening political conditions which require secular and liberal-minded Indians (which all the authors identify as) to clarify their position and declare their allyship with those marginalised by the dominant Hindu nationalist narrative.

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[3] Dutta, p. 92.

[4] Such a parallel can be furthered by Antoinette Burton's reading of Cornelia Sorabji's relationship to the inhabitants of the *zenana* in the early twentieth C, where Sorabji 'constructed the zenana as a kind of heritage center and her own work as the place to which readers could go to witness this vanishing monument of "Indian" civilization', thus creating them as 'the metonymic signs of femininity particular to a generation'. I have argued that the mother in the bourgeois feminist novel of the 1980s and 1990s occupied a similar metonymic position that is protected within the confines of the upper-class Hindu home, with the daughter-protagonist becoming the tour guide through this authentic interiority amidst seismic shifts caused by a necessary Westernisation in the late twentieth C. Burton, p. 82; Sally Alexander, qtd. in Burton, p. 90.

These aims of recalibrating the Indian English novel by a female author in order to present a critique of the socio-political order and to present allyship to those marginalised within this order are clearly visible in Roy's work. In fact, Roy's first novel *The God of Small Things*, sets out upon this path in 1997, a few years before the novelists studied in this thesis embark upon the same goal of depicting the political contexts in which they write and protesting against specific instances of violence against marginalised communities. Roy's prescient first novel that paved the way for female authors' political engagement might then explain her particular success as well as the shift within the genre of women's fiction in English that this thesis has identified. Moreover, Roy's fiction also supports this thesis's argument that the involvement of urban, upper-class, English-speaking women in both building and critiquing the nation since the turn of the millennium has only intensified, through her second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), published two decades after her first.

If *The God of Small Things* already evoked the demarcations of caste and class and the violent consequences for those inhabiting the margins of this society, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* embodies the most ferocious critique of the fractures within Indian society caused in particular by the political climate in the country and even the world. From the September 11 attacks on the Twin Towers in the United States to the Godhra riots of Gujarat, from the Indian military's occupation of Kashmir to the rise of the BJP, Hindu nationalism and their figurehead Narendra Modi, from the Maoist insurgency in the Red Corridor of central India to the lynching of Dalits and Muslims by upper-caste cow vigilantes, the novel undertakes the gargantuan task of establishing a relationship between its intersex Hijra protagonist Anjum, who lives in a graveyard (thus inhabiting a literal margin, a space between life and death) and these occurrences that directly or indirectly impact her life and sense of community. Within this graveyard, Anjum gathers a motley group of survivors of

the various dominant hegemonic discourses that violently marginalise them; the graveyard is thus made into 'the staging ground for revolution in India' within which are formed 'the only possible networks of radical solidarity.'[5] In this recent novel, then, Roy identifies intersectional solidarity as the grounds upon which agency and resistance can be accessed by survivors of oppression, a tool which this thesis has also highlighted in its literary analysis of texts that predate Roy's *Ministry* by one or even two decades.

Both at the level of characterisation and at the level of the author's own investment in utilising her authorial privileges to highlight injustices that affect those with whom the author shares no personal identification apart from the will to create a secular, just, and peaceful idea of the Indian nation, Roy's fictional oeuvre thus fits well into the mould of allyship that this thesis has hypothesised. And it is this role of the ally, which we have seen to be a relatively new introduction to bourgeois feminist fiction, that is central to understanding the relationship between politics and women's fiction in the twenty-first century. Since the publication of *Fugitive Histories* in 2009 (chronologically, the last text examined in this thesis), Indian female authors writing in English from locations of privilege have continued to engage with and present resistance to the dominant Hindu nationalist and neoliberal agendas. The return of the BJP's dominance in 2014 has necessitated female authors' contemplation of how their fiction might function as a medium of protest, and of representation for the marginalised. The return of the prolific author Nayantara Sahgal to fiction after a decade to write specifically on themes of intolerance, violence, and the fate of Muslim, Dalit, poor and female citizens in India (in *Day of Reckoning*, 2015; *When the Moon Shines by Day*, 2017; and *The Fate of Butterflies*, 2019) suggests the urgency with which

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[5] Arundhati Roy in Pavan Kumar Malreddy, 'The Syntax of Everyday Justice: A Conversation with Arundhati Roy', *Wasafiri*, 36.3 (2021), 41–49 (p. 45).

female authors seem to be responding to an unspoken call to protest against the direction in which the BJP government is leading the country.

In the last two years, a few English-language political texts by female authors have directly addressed religious fundamentalism, including Meghna Majumdar's *A Burning* (2020) and Anindita Ghose's *The Illuminated* (2021). The rise of authors like Meena Kandasamy, who presents a strong anti-caste stance in both fiction (*The Gypsy Goddess*, 2014) and poetry (*Ms. Militancy*, 2010), points to the developing centrality of these concerns within the genre of women's writing in English, and the radicality it is now able to create space for. The movement toward political commentary identified in the works of the authors under study in this thesis also continues into the 2010s – Manju Kapur's 2016 novel, *Brothers*, presents links to contemporary concerns with caste and politics,[6] while a number of Githa Hariharan's recent publications (both fiction and non-fiction) concern themselves with the caste discrimination of past and present (*I Have Become the Tide*, 2019), marginalisation of Dalits, adivasis, workers, and minority communities (edited anthology titled *Battling for India: A Citizen's Reader*, 2019), and the Israel-Palestine conflict (edited anthology titled *From India to Palestine: In Solidarity*, 2014).

The shifting relationship of upper-class urban women's creative endeavours to politics itself is visible beyond the shift in women's fiction writing – for example, in the film industry. Female film directors like Nandita Das who co-wrote and directed *Firaaq* (2008) which focuses upon the Godhra riots and presents a fierce critique of Hindutva violence, or Shonali Bose who wrote, directed and produced *Amu* (2005) which highlights the aftermath of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and ends with a brief mention of the Godhra riots, showcase the

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[6] In her review of the novel, Neha Bhatt notes the narrative's proximity to the political murder of BJP politician Pramod Mahajan by his brother Pravin in 2006. Neha Bhatt, 'Manju Kapur's New Novel Doesn't Try Too Hard to Hide Its Connection with Pramod Mahajan's Murder', *Scroll.In*, 21 January 2017, section Book Review <https://scroll.in/article/827025/manju-kapurs-new-novel-doesnt-try-too-hard-to-hide-its-connection-with-pramod-mahajans-murder> [accessed 9 June 2022].

centrality of such female creators to a national conversation about and a protest against communal violence. Beyond the realms of fictional narratives as well, women have become invaluable contributors to the debate on the state of India's secularism through their journalism. Examples include the work of journalist Rana Ayyub who published *Gujarat Files: Anatomy of a Cover Up* (2016) based on her undercover investigation of the Gujarat police and government's involvement in the Godhra riots, documentary filmmaker Nisha Pahuja who directed *The World Before Her* (2012) that partially focuses on a Durga Vahini[7] training camp for young girls, as well as documentary filmmaker Shirley Abraham who co-directed *The Hour of Lynching* (2019) which centres on the murder of a Muslim dairy farmer Rakbar Khan by cow vigilantes in northern India. Journalistic organisations like *Khabar Lahariya* which trains Dalit woman in the rural heartland of India to become journalists reporting grassroots issues through a feminist lens[8], or *Splainer* which is a subscription-based news service written by women and aimed specifically at a female audience that intends to move 'women's media' beyond 'shopping, leisure, beauty, health, maybe parenting – soft news,'[9] underline the work undertaken by women to disrupt the marginal position that women are expected to inhabit as both the creators and the audiences of political narratives.

Through such proliferation of women's creative contributions, we are able to reconfigure our understanding of 'women's writing' in India that expands considerably in the twenty-first century and incorporates far more than the expected scope of the private and the familial. If Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha's expansive anthology of Indian women's writing, published in 1991, found that it must 'point to the structural connections between women's

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[7] As mentioned in Chapter 2, Durga Vahini is the women's wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a Hindutva organisation.

[8] A documentary based on the work of *Khabar Lahariya* was also co-written and co-produced by female documentary filmmaker Rintu Thomas. The film, titled *Writing with Fire* (2021), was the first Indian feature documentary to receive an Oscar nomination.

[9] Sabah Virani, 'Lakshmi Chaudhry's Splainer Is Re-Imagining What It Means to Build a Direct Relationship with an Audience', *Splice Media*, 13 January 2021 <https://www.splicemedia.com/stories/lakshmi-chaudhrys-splainer> [accessed 7 September 2022].

issues and public politics and between these and literary texts', by the second decade of the

twenty-first century, it seems that the distinct spheres of 'women's issues', 'public politics'

and 'literary texts' (or any form of creative text) have collapsed into an intersectional

conglomerate that reorganise the spheres of women's influences and concerns.[10] It is this

blurring of boundaries that allows a young woman to become the centre of a conversation

(and controversy) about nationalism and war through publishing a video on social media

(which has contributed to the erasure of boundaries between public and private) in which she

holds up a placard that reads 'Pakistan did not kill my father, war killed him.' Through this

video, the young student Gurmehar Kaur advocated for peace between the two countries

based on her personal, familial loss of her father in the 1999 Kargil War, thus harnessing both

the public and private to promote her view of national identity.[11] It is this blurring that

accounts for women's rising participation in and influence over national debates over the last

decade, whether that is on the streets of India or on social media.

In this merging of spheres, 'women's issues' *become* 'public politics', such as in the

case of protests for women's safety in the public sphere (which include the protests after the

2012 rape and murder of Jyoti Singh, in which thousands of women across the country

marched on the streets, or during movements such as 'Pinjra Tod' (2015), 'Why Loiter'

(2016) and '#MeToo' (2018)) which have strongly impacted upon parliamentary proceedings

and led to changes in laws and policies, while also highlighting initiatives to make public and

political spaces safely habitable for women. Conversely, political movements that are not

necessarily classed as 'women's issues' (such as the anti-CAA protests of 2020 which

challenged the BJP government's proposed Citizenship Amendment Act that would render

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[10] Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, 'Preface', in *Women Writing in India: Volume II: The 20th Century* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1993), pp. xv–xxiv (p. xviii).

[11] Abhipsha Mahapatro, 'Man Behind "Pakistan Did Not Kill My Father" Video Backs Gurmehar', *The Quint*, 28 February 2017 <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/gurmehar-kaur-pakistan-did-not-kill-my-father-video-facebook-page-voice-of-founder-backs-her> [accessed 7 September 2022].

many Indian Muslim citizens stateless) have been led by women. Moreover, in the particular case of the anti-CAA protests, it was the Indian Muslim woman who became the figurehead for revolution and resistance, from Ayesha Renna and Ladeeda Farzana who captured the nation's imagination through the photos and videos that surfaced of them leading protests while distinctly clad in burqas, to the Muslim labourers and housewives who organised a sit-in blockade in the working-class neighbourhood of Shaheen Bagh in New Delhi that became the nucleus of the protests for 101 days. Another display of such intersectionality was visible in the farmers' protests of 2020-2021 which saw large numbers of female farmers from rural India arriving at the protest sites on the borders of Delhi to vocally participate in the movement.[12]

All the instances of creative and activist endeavours listed above make evident that, in the last decade, the separation of spheres visible in the texts from the 1980s and 1990s that this thesis has studied, as well as in the criticisms levied against them, is no longer viable. Since the re-election of the BJP in 2014, the politics of Hindutva no longer remains the concern only of those marginalised in its discourse; it seeps into the upper-class home and family. This is identified by none other than Shashi Deshpande, in her 2018 article in a newspaper, when she notes,

> The polarisation that happened after 2014 meant that not only the country, not just politicians, but even families were divided by a sharp clean line. I know for a fact how much bitterness developed between friends, within families. There never was a midway meeting ground; the general understanding was that "if you are not with us you are against us". This has left its mark on the country and I fear it will be worse after the coming elections.[13]

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[12] 'Month on, Women Hold the Fort at India Farmer Protests', *The Independent* (London, 30 December 2020) <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/month-on-women-hold-the-fort-at-india-farmer-protests-india-narendra-modi-women-farmers-two-b1780192.html> [accessed 7 September 2022]; Namita Singh, 'Women Turn out in Huge Numbers to Support India's Farmer Protests on International Women's Day', *The Independent* (London, 8 March 2021) <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/india/farmers-protest-india-international-womens-day-b1813930.html> [accessed 7 September 2022].

[13] Deshpande, 'Shashi Deshpande: "Will India Become a Hindu Nation and Non-Hindus Become Second-Class Citizens?"'

The largest factor in causing this seeping of politics into the personal is the centrality of social media to political conversation. Williams et al have noted how the 'digital living room' of WhatsApp 'has become central to everyday "political talk" in India' which directly affects the experience of 'lived democracy'.[14] The upper-class, upper-caste home and its inhabitants are no longer able to remain apolitical, or use this space as respite from the 'political public sphere'. The fracture within Indian society thus shifts from space (private versus public) and even class, to ideology (left-wing versus right-wing), which permeates through families, friendships, educational institutes (as seen in the targeted attacks upon students at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University by Hindutva forces), and professional spaces. However, this is not to suggest that hierarchies of religion, caste, or class have disappeared as people 'come together' either in support of or against the BJP and its agenda. In fact, even in this moment of *speaking out*, the question of the right of/to representation remains.

The prevalence of this question is evident when Arundhati Roy elaborates in her interview upon her role as a privileged female author writing from perspectives decidedly not her own (*Ministry* follows Anjum's free indirect discourse for the first and third parts, while the second section largely uses the perspective of an Indian Intelligence Bureau officer who supports Indian occupation in Kashmir). Roy identifies the tool which helps her in offering a representation of both dominant and suppressed voices without speaking *over* them, which is her reliance upon first-hand accounts that have been collected from her years of travelling in Kashmir, and the invitations she has received 'into the homes of Kashmiri militants and the

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[14] Philippa Williams and others, 'No Room for Dissent: Domesticating Whatsapp, Digital Private Space, and Lived Democracy in India', *Antipode*, 54.1 (2022), 305–30 (p. 306). The article notes how 'the family WhatsApp group [is] a place for reinforcing kinship through digital sociality' and thus reproduces the hierarchies of gender and generation that are present within the physical space of the home. It goes on to provide multiple ethnographic instances of younger generations of the family struggling to express dissent to majoritarian politics within the patriarchal digital space.

jungle to meet with Maoist insurgents.'[15] In fact, Roy insists upon being taken seriously in her political fiction precisely because of her non-fiction work: 'I'm not the naïve fiction writer, I'm a person who's written 20 years of frontline stuff.'[16] For this novelist, then, the fictional mode is still cloistered in some way unless it is complemented by direct involvement in politics. Roy does not valorise the novel's capacity to straddle both the personal and political, or its metaphoric function that allows for commentary upon politics through metonym. Instead, she highlights its ability to articulate the unimaginable: 'Only fiction is truth in Kashmir. You can't write an evidentiary essay telling anyone the truth of how bizarre it is there.'[17]

Roy's defensive statement about the naivete of fiction writers underlines the manner in which novelists (especially female novelists) continue to be considered unsuited to comment on the state of the nation and its politics. This thesis has aimed to disrupt such an understanding of literary works through a focus upon the threads of 'everyday resistance' visible in them that present a particular correlation to the way politics is lived and negotiated with in a quotidian manner by each individual. Politics and identity temper conversations between mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, friends and colleagues, as evident in the examples given by Williams et al in the article mentioned above, as well as a number of articles published in newspapers in which young Indians attempt to navigate political conflicts within the family.[18] These interfamilial conversations suggest (as seen in some of

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[15] Sinclair.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Aditya Bhalla, 'Help Me! My Father Is a Bhakt', *Arré* <https://www.arre.co.in/modern-family/help-me-my-father-is-a-bhakt/> [accessed 12 September 2022]; Suryatapa Mukherjee, 'No Blackmail, No Derision: Patience Helps Me Turn My Mother Away From Bigotry', *Arré* <https://www.arre.co.in/modern-family/patience-helps-me-turn-my-mother-away-from-bigotry/> [accessed 12 September 2022]; Adila Matra, 'Dad Called Me Khan Market Gang: Being Anti-Modi In A Bhakt Family', *The Quint*, 22 May 2019 <https://www.thequint.com/elections/dad-called-me-khan-market-gang-being-anti-modi-in-a-bhakt-family> [accessed 12 September 2022]; Aditya Sinha, 'My Father, the Modi Bhakt', *Mid-Day* (Mumbai, 1 April 2019) <https://www.mid-day.com/news/opinion/article/my-father--the-modi-bhakt-413168> [accessed 12 September 2022].

the cited articles) that the battle for achieving a shift away from right-wing politics in the near future must be fought in the very private spaces (whether physical or digital) that 'bourgeois' feminist fiction has come to represent. Perhaps, then, fictional narratives about navigating familial relations can provide some valuable insight into how these concerns are to be addressed within the hierarchical hegemonyof the patriarchal family system, while also underlining the homogeneity of this space and extending the allyship that is necessary to those who exist *outside* of the upper-caste, upper-class family (in terms of religion, class, caste, language, and the privileges these signify) through these conversations.

In conclusion, this thesis hopes to have contributed to the study of women's resistance through an intersectional perspective, and to have underlined the ways in which Indian women's writing in English in the last 50 years has evolved to participate in the depiction of such resistance. Through its literary analysis centred around female agency, from 'failure' as resistance, and more conventional forms of agency available to women within patriarchal confines, to 'solidarity' as resistance through the formation of female-centred homes, and finally to 'protest' as resistance in direct response to the violence engendered by Hindu nationalism in Indian public space, this thesis has hopefully supported the development of a pattern of the literary representation of women's resistance that is rooted in the political milieu in which the authors are publishing their works. It is clear from the literary and activist trends this conclusion has highlighted that such resistance (and its depictions) continue to play a role in a national political framework as neoliberalism and the advent of social media create more possibilities for women's participation in national concerns. It is also evident that women's understanding of their own resistance continues to be complex and constantly negotiated.

This is highlighted by Shrayana Bhattacharya in her article on Independence Day 2022 that takes stock of the freedom that women have achieved in the 75 years of Indian

liberation. Through her ethnographic work, Bhattacharya identifies how for some women, 'freedom mean[s] freedom from having to earn a living', for others it means 'freedom from an oppressive arranged marriage and the liberty to explore [their] sexual appetites', and for still others, it means 'being rescued from hours of load-shedding and irregular water supply so [they can] watch an hour of cable television in peace.'[19] In 2022, Indian women thus stand in the midst of a net of dominant discourses, whether that be patriarchy, or neoliberalism, or secularism, or Hindu nationalism, or feminism. They negotiate between these discourses to achieve their personal, multi-hued, indefinable forms of agency and resistance.

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[19] Shrayana Bhattacharya, 'The Private Rebellions of Indian Women', *Mint* (Delhi, 15 August 2022) <https://www.livemint.com/politics/news/the-private-rebellions-of-indian-women-11660500167983.html> [accessed 12 September 2022].

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