

Friction To Fusion: an Analysis of Conflict between Mothers-In-Law and Daughters-In-Law in Poile Sengupta's Inner Laws

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Abstract

The universal institution of the family is the basic unit of society. It plays an important role in the life of an individual as well as the community, especially in India. Poile Sengupta, in her Inner Laws scrutinizes the family unit and the conflict among five mothers-in-law and five daughters-in-law. The social and psychological reason behind their attitudes and their antagonism towards each other is vividly portrayed. Sengupta, in her characteristic humorous and witty way, exposes the superficialities in their hatred for each other. There exist an underlying love and concern on both sides for the other. Through empathy and mutual understanding, the in-laws can overcome their friction. The play shows how simple it is for both the generations to overcome their differences and come together as one, paving the way for fusion and family harmony.

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Family is a universal institution, a basic unit and an integral part of every society. Through the institution of marriage, a family is established. Family is composed of persons united by ties of marriage/blood or adoption. Family is the smallest institution in society. Every human individual is part of a family. Family can be categorized as a family of orientation or family of procreation. A family of orientation is a natal family where one is born. A family of procreation refers to the family created through marriage or by adopting children.

In India, family plays a great role in the life of an individual as well as the community and it has survived through the ages. Traditionally, Indian families are deep-rooted in the concept of the joint family system. A joint family is otherwise known as an extended family. It embraces a wider network of relatives which include grandparents, parents, married children and their spouses, unmarried

children, spinsters, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and in some cases, some distant relatives.

The joint family is collectively-oriented. Collectivism involves family integrity, loyalty, unity, harmony, interdependence, cooperation and concern for others. In a joint family, the protocol is strictly followed. The views of the head of the family prevail upon others, especially in deciding career, property matters, marriages and education of the off-springs. Discipline is firmly enforced. All the family members abide by the perception of the head with full respect. Any disagreement or misunderstanding is sorted out by heeding to the advice of the elders. All the members of the family work cohesively to solve any problem. As Mullati (1995) states, the Indian family is a social institution which is united, strong, protective, and resilient.

Unfortunately, collectivism giving way to individualism is leading to changes in the family system. "Social change is an inevitable social process, which can be defined as observable

transformations in social relationships. This transformation is most evident in the family system” (Augustine, 1982, p. 2). The pervasive mass media, formal education, consumerist culture, and market forces led to a sense of high individualism and thirst for freedom. Youngsters challenging the authoritative head of a household result in the family split into several units. Social factors like industrialization, urbanization and commercialization have also accelerated the emergence of the nuclear family.

Though the concept of nuclear family come into existence in India, it is not easy to shake the strong foundation of the joint family system which is deeply rooted in Indian tradition and culture. Most of the nuclear families retains the functional extension of the joint family system. They maintain joint family ethics, ethos, kinship-orientation, family bond, family sentiments, family integrity and loyalty. There is no qualitative change in the family system. The differences are only in the role relation and normative patterns of behavior among the family members. The spirit of the joint family system remains intact in spite of residential separation. Family members own joint-property, attend family functions, celebrate festivals together, consult elders on important matters, heed to their advice when needed and extend mutual help in a crisis.

One of the major domestic problems in both the joint family and the nuclear family is the conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Oftentimes, in a joint family, a mother-in-law’s relationship with her daughter-in-law is an unmitigated authority and domination. Daughter-in-law is at the bottom of the generational and gender hierarchies. As she does not have blood ties and a shared history of experience, it becomes difficult to establish a bond. Hence, their relationship is marked by conflict, doubts, suspicion, jealousy, dispute, verbal assault, resentment, and hostility. The influence of in-laws has an impact even in nuclear

families, even though they are not physically present in the daily basis.

Hostility between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law is a perennial problem. The daughter-in-law enters into matrimony with the assumption that the mother-in-law is a dictator who will ill-treat her. Mother-in-law, in turn, considers her daughter-in-law as a formidable adversary to reckon with.

Vatuk makes certain pertinent observations about older women especially mothers-in-law thus:

Older women – as mothers and, especially, as mothers-in-law – are described as key agents for the enforcement of ‘patriarchal’ social norms ... oppressing their sons’ wives by forcing them to accept a subordinate status and denying them adequate nutrition, insisting upon adherence to stringent standards of modesty and confinement to the home ... and, in extreme cases of dowry abuse, even contributing to their deaths. (as cited in Allendroff, 2015, p. 2106)

Daughters-in-law level certain serious charges against mothers-in-law, branding them as overbearing, manipulative, bossy and possessive. Mothers-in-law bring counter-charges against daughters-in-law as immature, selfish, calculative and irresponsible.

Many sociologists and psychologists have dealt with the conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, analyzing the causes and consequences of this problem offering them practical solutions to solve this issue. In Literature, this conflict is not a central focus of any story or novel. This crucial problem can affect the fabric of the family, which is the fundamental unit of society. VeenaVenugopal (2014) documents in *The Mother-in-law: The Other Woman in Marriage*, the appalling real-life stories of twelve daughters-in-law including her own bitter personal experience. This book projects all mothers-in-law as unlikeable dreaded figures, the personification of evil. To them, daughters-in-law are just working machines, maids and at the most,

pretty dolls, which have to dance to their whims and fancies. They taunt daughters-in-law with abusive language even for petty things, making their life a veritable hell. PoileSengupta is the only Indian female dramatist who staged a rare satirical comedy called *Inner Laws* in 1994 and later published in the collection of plays, *Women Center Stage* in 2010. It is a unique play, on a rare subject but a common problem in the Indian family. It is a funny take on the conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. *Inner Laws*, "... mockingly presents female frivolities in a bid to encourage the audience/reader to reflect, criticize and in the end, actively attempt to transform the perceived human behavior towards more congenial relationship and a better social order" (Khindri, 2018, p. 128).

In two acts and three scenes, PoileSengupta (2010) brings five mothers-in-law pitted against five daughters-in-law in the mock-epic style of Alexander Pope, "I have tried as Pope did so effectively, to just hint a fault and hesitate dislike" (p. 71). Inner laws are not constitutional laws; they are formulated by mothers-in-law which are unwritten and arbitrary. They differ from person to person, from household to household. It is interesting to note the names of the five pairs of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law – Mrs. Vasudev and Rugmini, Mrs. Nandhan and Radha, Mrs. Pandu and Chitra, Mrs. Dasarath and Urmila, Mrs. Hrimaan and Laavanya (Vanya). All mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law except one pair are symbolic representations from great epics like *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana* and the Sanskrit text *Bhagavatham*. Rugmini is Krishna's wife. Being the biological mother of Krishna, Mrs. Vasudev is the mother-in-law of Rugmini. Mrs. Nandhan, the foster mother of Krishna, is the mother-in-law of Krishna's sweetheart Radha. Mrs. Dasarath is the mother-in-law of Urmila, who is the wife of Laxman. Arjuna's mother Mrs. Pandu is the mother-in-law of Chitra/Chitrangada, wife of Arjuna. The names of Mrs. Hrimaan and Laavanya are non-mythological and non-historical. But Mrs. Hrimaan

stands for modesty, Laavanya for grace. Though the names do not have any significant connection to the plot of *Inner Laws*, they add piquancy to the play. Sengupta states her reason for the choice of all-women cast in this play, "*Inner Laws* was triggered by my feeling at that time, that there were more talented and committed women actors in Bangalore than men and that it was possible to bring together a cast of ten women" (p.71).

There are two clubs in the play, MIL and DIL. The stage is well demarcated into three divisions. Downstage right is allocated to the DIL club, with minimal furniture and decoration. Downstage left is given to the MIL club, which is arranged clumsily with newly purchased furniture. Mrs. Hrimaan's house is located, center stage, a place of reconciliation. The light effects are planned by turning on the lights only where the action takes place. MIL stands for mother-in-law and DIL stands for daughter-in-law. Vanya explains that DIL club has nothing to do with hearts or problems related to hearts, "It has nothing to do, even remotely with affection. D...I...L stands for daughters-in-law" (p. 75). Members of both clubs gossip and criticize others indirectly. These clubs are meant to air-out their frustrations about each other. DIL club proclaims, "It stands for Freedom! For Liberty! It's our call to Sisterhood! ... Join us...all you newlywed girls with mothers-in-law ...join us...join our call Say it with me Down with reactionaries! Away with our suppressors! Our repressor! Our oppressors! Our depressors!" (p. 78). Daughters-in-law openly make harsh remarks on the attitude of the MIL. Urmila of DIL club welcomes a new daughter-in-law of the town – Laavanya alias Vanya. Vanya, unlike others, has cordial relationships with her mother-in-law that she says, "I mean mothers-in-law can be quite ...you know...quite nice?" (p. 81). DIL club members are astonished at that and have doubts about her sanity. Urmila expresses it, "You are suffering from acute post-marital anxiety. You show unmistakable signs

of nervous impairment and verbal regression.” (p. 78)

DIL club and MIL club have an array of complaints against each other on various petty issues. Hrimaan’s uncle comments on the women not being able to work together, “...two heads, that is two men, can always work together in peace. But two pairs of breasts! Oh, two pairs of breasts will get into a fight” (p.93). DIL club is a ‘survival kit’ and a ‘trade union’. Each member upon joining the club has to fill a detailed questionnaire about her mother-in-law as she is the problem-creator. “Indian girls take it for granted that our mothers-in...our MILs ... are going to be hostile to us”(p. 81). The hostility stems from the possessive mothers who do not want to give up their hold on their sons. Hence, mothers-in-law are their oppressors, they belong to the enemy camp, the MIL club. Mothers-in-law club also has strictly formulated rules for their members not to be in contact with the other daughters-in-law. Moreover, they “can’t let bahu rule over [them] like this.” (p. 90)

The daughters-in-law are the source of anguish and frustration for the mothers-in-law, as Mrs. Nandhan says, “How I can be all right? I live with my daughter-in-law, is it not?”(p. 85) In the MIL club, they share their grievances about their sons’ choice of bride. In India, most marriages are arranged, love marriage is an exception; in arranged marriages, mother-in-law takes the lead role in decision-making. The choice of the bride is her prerogative and she has the final say. She always thinks highly of her son and considers him as Paramathma, a paragon of virtue and so she sets unrealistic standards in choosing a bride. She feels that the bride should have a fair complexion, should be affluent, good looking, highly educated, a good cook and in addition to it, she should be docile and obedient. A mother-in-law always expects a subservient daughter-in-law. From the beginning, the relationship between the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law is strained, and tension is built. Once married, a son is no more a mama’s boy;

hence the mother-in-law feels betrayed and rejected which lead to unreasonable anger towards the daughter-in-law. The mother-in-law is jealous and thinks that she is replaced by the new bride in her son’s heart. The mother-in-law claims son’s affection as her birthright and the daughter-in-law demands it as her conjugal right. Roots of this problem lie in their competitive nature, “Gender competitiveness causes maladjustments and non-negotiable relationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law” (Adikari, 2015, p. 100). Mrs. Nandhan’s son has chosen to marry his childhood friend Radha and she is forced to accept this marriage. So she complains, “They used to play together as children ... she got her hooks into him when they were in LKG” - (Sengupta, 2010, p. 88) Mrs. Nandhan expected a pretty and fashionable daughter-in-law but her son chose a traditional type of a girl as he has political aspirations. She accuses Radha of overdoing it and pretending to be old-fashioned, “...oily hair, not good in English, rural type.” (p. 87) Mrs. Vasudev feels that Mrs. Nandhan is lucky enough to arrange the love marriage of her son because her son eloped and got married, disappointing the mother. She wanted a grand wedding and huge dowry, “I wanted it in a seven-star hotel, near the Arabian Sea with a rainbow in the sky and a helicopter pad and big cut-outs of the bride and groom ...” (p. 89) Since her son has made his own choice of bride, the mother-in-law passes judgment on his wife’s character, “She eloped with him, can you imagine? Elopel! What kind of a girl is she? What is her family background?” (p. 89) Mothers-in-law dislike the girls taking the initiative in the name of love. Mrs. Dasarath has chosen a bride for her son hoping that the girl would be like her cousin, “Such a sweet girl. [The cousin] has gone off to Africa with [my] nephew to the bush, you know. She said if he had to sleep on thorns, she would sleep on thorns.” (p. 89) But her daughter-in-law refuses to go to Africa with her sociologist husband. “She stayed here, sleeping on a foam mattress and eating good food.” (p. 89) Even a well-educated daughter-in-law doesn’t match the

expectation of the mother-in-law. Mrs. Pandu considers her daughter-in-law, an IPS officer to be bossy and aggressive. “The whole world has to go her rules kemutabik.” (p. 88) In general, all these mothers-in-law want to slaves for their sons, not equal life-partners.

“The world of women sometimes appear harmonious and sometimes troubled, sometimes there exists respect and love, sometimes hatred and criticism of one another” (Parghi, 2015, p. 154). Mother-in-law considers the kitchen as her turf. She feels allowing the daughter-in-law into the kitchen as an encroachment. Mrs. Nandhan invariably makes critical remarks about the culinary skills of her daughter-in-law, Radha, “When you make puri it is like cardboard and when you knit sweater, it comes out like halva.” (Sengupta, 2010, p. 84) Being a diabetic patient, she feels dejected when her daughter-in-law serves insipid diet food, and she is fond of spicy, chilly, hot food soaked in ghee, butter or vanaspati and considers it tasty and healthy. She calls the food given to her son as, “prison food.” (p. 82) She grumbles, “...no rice ... just dry wheat chapatti...and only vegetables...boiled, boiled, boiled...the boy working so hard morning to night ...but you rakshasi...you giving him prison food, convict food... (p. 82) She also accuses Radha of wishing her (Mrs. Nandan) a heart attack that she tries to ply her with sweets like ‘neiappam’ and ‘payasam’ to hasten her towards an early grave. She insinuates that Radha's solicitous concern is nothing but a pretense to please her husband. Her accusation reaches its absurd and ludicrous heights when she emphatically states that her daughter-in-law's action stems from her desire to possess her imported non-stick pan from America. It indicates her excessive possessive nature even over trivial objects. No wonder, this naturally extends to people like her son. Mothers-in-law think that they are the real master chefs, and criticize their daughters-in-law. Mrs. Vasudev mocks at her daughter-in-law Rugmini's lack of experience in cooking, “She can't even boil a banana.” (p. 90)

Mothers-in-law also criticize their dressing sense. Daughters-in-law are generally rebuked for their modern outfits as they consider them not appropriate for a housewife. Even if a daughter-in-law prefers to dress traditionally, she is termed as old-fashioned or plain. But strangely, some mothers-in-law show a keen interest in make-up and fashions even in their old age that daughters-in-law make fun of them. Mrs. Dasarath feels dejected when her daughter-in-law taunts her for applying too much of make-up, “When I put on my make-up she says I am trying to attract men... But why should I do that? I am a widow.” (p. 88)

Mrs. Vasudev expects the daughter-in-law to watch and discuss soap operas. She assumes that knowledge and familiarity with these serials will increase their intellectual capacity. It is really weird if a daughter-in-law shows her unwillingness to follow the soap operas. Mrs. Vasudev is an ardent follower of TV serials, especially the passionate romances. Her obsession makes her compare the real-life characters with the reel characters. She tells Radha, “You talk exactly like the second heroine in my favorite serial, Kara.” (p. 124)

When Chitra concentrates on health and spends time in a gym, Mrs. Pandu taunts her and insists that she should focus on domestic responsibilities. Moreover, mothers-in-law use various abusive words to describe their daughters-in-law such as ‘Rakshasi’, ‘she-devil’, ‘cruel daughter-in-law’, ‘sorceress’ ‘stupid girl’ and ‘lazy-bottom daughter-in-law’.

Even daughters-in-law have charges galore against their mothers-in-law. Daughters-in-law feel that the mothers-in-law invariably blame the daughters-in-law of being juvenile. Mrs. Dasarath accuses Urmila of being childish, “[Her] mentality is that of a three-year-old with a TV- cum potato-chip-cum-tomato chilli sauce fixation.” (p. 84) Many mothers-in-law in Inner Laws fit into the categories of in-laws as per the observation of Susan Forward (2002) in her work *Toxic-in-Laws: Loving Strategies for Protecting your Marriage*. She categorizes toxic in-

lawas as ‘the critics’, ‘the controllers’, ‘the engulfers’, ‘the masters of chaos’, and ‘the rejectors’.

According to the daughters-in-law of the play, their mothers-in-law are great critics finding fault with them. “Critics are the in-laws who look upon almost every interaction as an opportunity to scrutinize your opinions, feelings, and actions, weigh them against their own, and find you lacking.” (Forward, 2002, p. 59) As experienced persons in the family, instead of guiding the young wives, they nag and question their daughters-in-law. Instead of sleeping in her bedroom, Mrs. Nandhan sleeps on the sofa in the hall and asks a hundred thousand questions like an income tax officer. She criticizes Radha for showing concern and arranging a physician to take care of her. She comments on the youthful appearance of the physician, implying his lack of experience, “What doctor? That boy who comes, he is the doctor? He does not have a mustache or beard.” (Sengupta, 2010 82) When Radha serves diet food to her husband on the doctor's recommendation, she castigates her for providing insipid food to her son. Moreover, she feels that she is the apt person to care for her son's health, “What doctor knows? A doctor has carried a baby in the stomach for nine months? [...] What do you know ...my son is god, not that good-for-nothing doctor?” (p. 82) Similarly, Mrs. Dasarath also blames Urmila as selfish as she feels that Urmila has prioritized her comforts and stayed back when her son was assigned a project, overseas. Urmila has sacrificed her happiness to take care of the aged mother-in-law. Even her good intentions are misconstrued. Mothers-in-law such as Mrs. Nandhan and Mrs. Dasarath can be categorized as critics.

Some mothers-in-law are controllers who want to monitor everybody in the family and want to decide everything for the family.

“In the family structure they created long before you arrived on the scene, controllers hold the ultimate authority, and they have no intention of giving it

up... Equality and independence, the natural, desirable touchstones we all strive for, are not of the controllers' plan.” (Forward, 2002, p. 152)

Mrs. Pandu is policing ironically, her daughter-in-law who is a policewoman. She is very inquisitive to know about daughter-in-laws whereabouts and watches intently to find out what time Chitra comes back home. Mrs. Nandhan employs a different strategy of control, a high pitched voice. Daughters-in-law feel that their mothers-in-law do not give them personal space and unnecessarily interfere in their matters. A few mothers-in-law are 'Engulfers' who seek the attention of their sons all the time. “the in-laws who measure your love in terms of time spent with them—and more is never enough.” (p. 108) The sons, in turn, suffer from ‘Madonna Malady’ (Sengupta, 2010, p. 82), believing that their mothers are virgins and pure and can do no wrong. Their reverence and blind belief about their mothers irk the daughters-in-law. With the arrival of the daughter-in-law, the mother-in-law feels sidelined, her dominion is threatened and her sovereignty is questioned. She also thinks that her importance is on the wane. Feeling ignored, she becomes an attention-seeker. Mrs. Vasudev makes constant demands on her son's time. She suffers from persecution-phobia that she will be put behind bars on charges of smuggling and the jailer will be a man. She sobs and pleads with her son to rescue her. Rugmini accuses her mother-in-law of being a drama queen and that she has deliberately concocted this story. “So she sits there sobbing and crying and ruining her son's shirt.” (p. 77) Rugmini hates pandering to such paranoia. Even Mrs. Hrimaan corroborates Rugmini's view, “You should see Mrs. Vasudev for drama! [...] I honestly think she needs psychiatric treatment.” (p. 92)

Some mothers-in-law exaggerate even slight discomfort. They harp on their problems so much, make contradictory statements, confuse others and drain their energy. Such behavior is termed as ‘master of chaos’, “these are the in-laws who are so unhappy and so chaotic that they create a spinning

vortex of ever-escalating crises and disasters.” (Forward, 2002, p. 195) Mrs. Nandhan, besides being a controller, is also a ‘master of chaos’ who makes it sound that diabetes is a deadly disease and her sugar level will increase by just looking at sweets. Radha is in a dilemma as the mother-in-law contradicts herself by criticizing her for being too strict about her diet and at other times for not being strict enough. Mrs. Vasudev could be called a rejector as she showed her unwillingness to accept Rugmini, who is not of her choice. “The rejectors—the in-laws who regard you as unacceptable.” (p. 241) Mrs. Vasudev refuses to host a reception for the newlyweds and doesn’t bother to introduce her to her friends.

Bhatla states, “A bride is the most vulnerable member of the family because she is new to the household and often the mother-in-law is the face of the patriarchy” (cited in Ghafour, 2014) Home, the private sphere is a contested battleground and sentimental dramas are played out there. Daughters-in-law consider mothers-in-law as a hindrance and bully as they intrude into their personal space. They love freedom and individualism.

Generally, daughters-in-law feel that the usefulness of a mother-in-law ends once she has chosen the bride. Rugmini feels that a mother-in-law is useless as a “condom in a nunnery.” (Sengupta, 2010, p. 76) Each mother-in-law has a fixation. Mrs. Vasudev insists that everybody should call her ‘Barbie doll’, the compliment given by her husband once. But Rugmini sarcastically says, “I think my father-in-law said that she reminded him of barbed wire.” (p. 76) Mrs. Vasudev also suffers from ‘Sita Syndrome’, that she will be imprisoned like Sita and expects her dutiful son to rescue her, as Rugmini says, coming in a Mercedes or Rolls Royce. Mrs. Dasarath constantly boasts that she is simple like Mother Teresa. But she is interested in grooming and states, “After all, a facial in need is a facial indeed.” (p. 110). Urmila mocks at her, “You should have seen the display exhibited by my so-called surrogate mother... Extra war paint on the face, fingernails

ready for battle, hair carefully styled to shield the head from attack...” (p. 97) Her attempts to look young, makes Urmila suggest a second marriage for Mrs. Dasarath.

A daughter-in-law is expected to sacrifice many things— her independence, dreams, hopes, her natal-family and in some cases, her career. Though she sacrifices a lot, she should think nothing of it. The enmity between the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law continues because they feel, “... there is no other excitement in their lives.” (p. 92)

Both Laavanya and Mrs. Hrimaan plan a strategy to resolve the problems between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. So far Laavanya was giving a rosy picture of her relationship with her mother-in-law. Now, she spins convincingly an imaginary story of her mother-in-law’s absurd behavior, especially in March she develops ‘Julius Caesar Jitters’ a kind of weird madness. Urmila remarks, that Laavanya so far suffered from ‘Pandora Phobia’. Once the Pandora box is opened, many skeletons have fallen out about her mother-in-law. The members of the DIL club readily offer to cure Mrs. Hrimaan with their expertise. While Rugmini volunteers to train Mrs. Hrimaan in mathematics, Chitra in aerobics. Urmila will have a psychological session with Mrs. Hrimaan and Radha also offers her services. Similarly, believing the concocted story of Mrs. Hrimaan, members of the MIL club also promise to cure Laavanya. Mrs. Pandu and Mrs. Nandhan will teach Laavanya good English and varieties of food. To enhance Laavanya’s appearance, Mrs. Dasarath and Mrs. Vasudev want to give facial and pretty clothes. The plan to bring the club members at different timings misfires when they land up at the same time. So they make arrangements to meet them in different rooms. A situation similar to the screen scene in *The School for Scandal* occurs. Meeting Chitra, Mrs. Dasarath takes her for Laavanya and gives her a facial. When she leaves to bring hot water, Mrs. Nandhan arrives with her frying pan. Looking at Chitra with a face mask, she mistakes her for a ghost and runs away in

fright, leaving the pan. When Radha hears her mother-in-law's voice, she applies a face-pack and sits down hiding the pan under the blanket. Mrs. Dasarath, who brings the hot water, asks Mrs. Pandu to hold it and goes with Mrs. Nandhan to search for her frying pan. As Urmila enters, she sees Mrs. Pandu with a bowl of water. Taking her for Mrs. Hrimaan, she sarcastically comments about the 'Lady Macbeth Syndrome' of cleanliness and connects it with the menopausal stage. Offended by her remarks, Mrs. Pandu boasts about her royal lineage. Being a psychologist, Urmila feels that the lady suffers from 'Noorjahan Neurosis'. Mrs. Pandu insists that Urmila should dip her hand into hot water for a manicure. When Urmila hears her mother-in-law's voice, she drops the bowl and escapes into another room. Mrs. Pandu complains to Mrs. Hrimaan that Laavanya tried to kill her by spilling the hot water on her. Mrs. Vasudev brings some clothes and a hat to try them on Laavanya. But she meets Radha and gives them to her. When she comments that her hair is like boiled noodles, Radha offers to teach her, 'how to boil clothes' and maintain them neatly. Mrs. Vasudev is shocked at the audacity of the young girl. Further, she is surprised to know that Radha is equally conversant with TV serials. She was under the impression, Laavanya is not interested in them. Happily, they sit and chat about their favorite TV serials. Rugmini comes in calling for Laavanya. Mrs. Vasudev tells Radha that is her daughter-in-law's voice. Only then, Radha realizes that she is not Mrs. Hrimaan, and Mrs. Vasudev finds out, she is not Laavanya. Meanwhile, Rugmini tries to teach mathematics to Mrs. Nandhan in vain as she is pre-occupied with her frying pan. When Mrs. Nandhan finds her frying pan under the sheet, she starts giving Rugmini her cooking session, but Rugmini is reluctant. When she makes an omelet, the frying pan gets burned. When Mrs. Nandhan blames Rugmini, Mrs. Vasudev jumps to her defense, "Kindly don't talk of my daughter-in-law in that way. She is a highly placed officer in a bank." (p. 135) Meanwhile, through Mrs. Pandu, Chitra comes to know the real identity of Mrs.

Dasarath. When Mrs. Pandu accuses Mrs. Dasarath as the reason for the confusion, Urmila defends her mother-in-law, "Excuse me, if you are referring to my mother-in-law, please use terms of social respect and acknowledgment." (p. 134). Though the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law have a lot of differences of opinions, they don't allow the outsiders to criticize them. It only proves that theirs is a silly tussle, which can be easily solved. Though Laavanya and Mrs. Hrimaan's ploy causes a lot of confusion, it results in harmony.

Sengupta's neologisms like, 'The Sita Syndrome', 'Madonna Malady', 'The Pandora Phobia', 'The Julius Caesar Jitters', 'The Lady Macbeth Syndrome' and 'The Noorjahan Neurosis' enrich the play. The mismatching dialogues cause laughter. The dialogues have sources from Greek literature, mathematics, medical science, and Sanskrit law. Sengupta makes this play multilingual, using Tamil and Hindi dialogues like Ayyayo, neiappam and baadmein. To make the play more comic, Sengupta comes up with her funny proverbs like, "You can't kill two birds with one heart attack" (p. 87) and "A facial in need is a facial indeed." (p. 110)

The problem between the mothers-in-law and the daughters-in-law is centered on the sons. But, strangely sons do not figure in the play. Only their professions are mentioned. Mothers mention their professions or talk about their character. Mrs. Nandhan's son has a political desire. He has gone to Switzerland on a special mission to find out how to eradicate malaria.

Though the satirical sitcom, Inner Laws is a much-needed road map that will connect people in a healthy relationship, build bridges and save a family from falling apart. It is an eye-opener for all the members concerned. The role of sons is like walking on eggshells. They have to navigate the delicate relationship between their mothers and wives with diplomacy. The mother-in-law should welcome the daughter-in-law without any negative vibes. Daughter-in-law's perception of the mother-in-law

also should change. They should begin the relationship on the right foot and set their limits. Teaming up together and marching towards unity could lead to a harmonious relationship. Sympathetic tolerance, reciprocal love and a sense of compromise can change the frustrating, uneasy, uncomfortable, infuriating relationship into a positive and affectionate bond. Friction would vanish and fusion is thus build up in among familial relationship.

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