

**Introduction to the exhibition,
'My Mother, My Daughter, Myself', 1992-3**

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Looking at these wonderful representations of mother-daughter friendships around me, I was reminded of an old song. Perhaps some of our friends in the audience will remember this song.

I feel envious too, for the very special friendship that must exist between mothers and daughters as portrayed in several of these delightful photographs. These friendships blossom - the mother-daughter relationship transforms - into something unique and precious in its own right.

Much more than emotions, what I see in these photographs - and the excellent text that accompanies them - is a reflection of where Asian women are at now. All three generations represent their own interpretations of freedom, happiness, success, contentment and ambition. These ever changing definitions meet the needs of our ever changing role, both as everyday people in our daily lives and as career women.

While many of our young women are breaking free from the conditioning and predetermined, pre-constructed role, it is a happy and hopeful thought that there are not many who want to get away from the culture altogether. It will not do to throw away our culture and become clones of western models of freedom, progress and happiness. There are adaptations and adjustments being made by all generations. Many have learnt to keep the best of both worlds, enrich their lives and know for real their role in the world.

At work too, Asian women are teasing out the complicated networks of power struggle and are learning to take control, become visible and make fine contributions at all levels in the society in which they live. They know that in order to gain any advantages they have to be right at the top. Men have never given up their power easily and are not going to now or in the future. Today, you will find Asian women in manual trades as well as managerial posts; and as doctors and teachers, lawyers and architects, film-makers and journalists. Today is a day for celebration of friendship and achievement. Yet I know I must

mention that the vast majority of my sisters are still trapped in menial jobs at the railway stations, airports, hospitals and clothing industries.

Our next step is to engage in political activities. We come from a long tradition of political fighters at all levels - Jhansi ki Rani, Indira Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto and Cori Aquino. All over the three nations that we come from, women are in the forefront of struggle: to save the forests, to fight for rights at work place and choose their own destiny. Why is there not a single one of us visible in the political arena in this country? Albeit slowly, we have begun to carve for ourselves an economic role. Let us prepare our daughters for their rightful place in Politics. They need to play a much broader role. Without that we are mere appendages of the mainstream, living in a shadow in marginalised positions at home and at work.

The young women and their mothers and daughters that you see in these pictures are confident and radiate hope and warmth for all of us.

To mothers who may also have sons I will say: equal opportunities start at home. A part of the strength of mother-daughter friendship is that they are good managers of change. They both have to change as they grow so that the generation gap does not become a barrier. Sadly much too often it does. They must always strive to have a dialogue. Talk, talk with each other. Open up conversations with others in the family and build bridges. It is one of my strategies for survival with my sons. Talk - always!

To daughters, I will say: this friendship with your mother will sustain you through some very significant moments because she will understand feelings in you that no other can, because you are of her flesh, because she has been there. Cherish it, nourish it, teach each other so that you may learn and grow towards a better awareness of each other's interpretations, perceptions, boundaries, loves and hates, likes and dislikes, fears and joys. None of this would happen by itself. Sadly we have sustained those elements of our culture which have enslaved us.

Let us remember Surya-Savitri today. Surya Savitri was born 4000 years before the birth of Christ and in Rigveda, this is the knowledge - this is the thought that she gave to the world.

When the morning sun meets the dawn, my eyes should be filled with knowledge. For my beloved sleeping beside me I should have the gift of vedmantar and love. I should wake up to entertain and host learned guests and when I sleep, Freedom should be my bed.