



Exploring the Dynamic Tapestry of Mother-Daughter Relationships in Indian English Literature

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Abstract— This paper will expound on the discourse of the ambivalent relationship between the duo mother and daughter. The role of motherhood as imposed on women and how it influences their relationship with their children, especially daughters. The expectations of society for a woman to be a good mother can harm the relationship between mother and daughter. How a daughter constructs her identity in terms of her relationship with her mother. It often involves a mixture of love, closeness, conflict, and tension. This paper will discuss the mother-daughter relationship portrayed in the works of Indian women writers.

Keywords— *Mother-Daughter Relationship, Ambivalent, Motherhood, Mothering*



Over the period, the parent-child relationship, especially 'mother' as nurturer to her child, has been perceived as the most sacred relationship on earth by our society. Being lenient over the role of a father in raising a child, a stern cum exalting discourse, mythologies, ideal symbolism have been composed over the role of a woman as "mother", who is destined to be a mother due to their biological functions. Motherhood is presented as *essential*, *normal* and *natural* for all women (Rhoda K. Unger, 2001).

A unique transformation of a daughter from an infant into an illuminating replica of her mother under the constant shadow of a mother, the ambivalent journey of the mother-daughter dyad is translucently perceived throughout their life span. Beginning from the tenderness of infancy transits into the adolescent upheaval of arguments to the incessant remorse and reconciliation in the adult years, the journey of mother-daughter is very dramatic (Apter, 1999; Baruch & Barnett, 1985; Fingerman, 1995; Fischer, 1981, 1986; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). In a family milieu, a mother is considered as the primary nurturer of the child, not the father, but the "mother" of the child. (Akgun, 2008) Although this perception has not been well-taken by our feminists as it limits the possibilities of women (Rich, 246). Women are considered responsible for the early love

and care in infancy and for socialising girls (Chodorow, 1978). This duo begins their journey together with "overwhelming love" that turns into angst and pangs of intolerance. A mother plays the role of a moulder who moulds her daughter's "ego" accordingly. Giving birth to a child can be challenging as this is an indirect process of transferring identity to a new object. It can be psychologically frustrating, emotionally torture some to a woman who doesn't just bear physical pain in the labour but covers the whole lifespan to nurture a child. A big oeuvre has been written to explore the child's psychology and how a child turns out into a well-being individual but little attention has been paid to the psychology of a mother. Although, Adrienne Rich explored this side of the mother and how a woman transits from a "woman" to "wife" and then a "mother", Paola Mariotti in *The Maternal Lineage* worked on psychology and its effects on mothering. She worked on the fundamental aspects of mothering. Hence, she posited that a woman acquires her "maternal identity" from her mother (2012). Not just identity, but sharing a bundle of knowledge to which Rich says, "that is subliminal, subversive, pre-verbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other" (1976, 220).

A mother enacts a crucial role in rearing a child especially a daughter. The mother-daughter relationship has been discerned as an equivocal issue since it has life-altering profound repercussions on the daughter as well as on the mother. As per the Empirical studies, a mother as a caregiver or nurturer acts as the most important role in a daughter's life. The power of this bond is perceived by women throughout their life, begins from the infantile daughter to the death of the mother (Orbach and Eichenbaum, 1987). The conflicts of this dyad can be perceived as reciprocated hunger for attention, scrimmaging over possession on each other, loathing imposition and making it impossible and possible for each other. The conglomerate of primary identification, symbiosis and separateness shadows a daughter's infancy and continues until she becomes a mother or sometimes a grandmother. (Hammer, 1975) According to Fischer's view, no relationship has a more emotional connection and interdependence than this mother-daughter relationship (1991). Undoubtedly, mothers have been granted the role of a primary socialiser, caretaker, while fathers are being assumed as the secondary nurturer and object of girls and boys (Chodorow, 1978, 1999).

Analysts expect that a good mother should be selfless and remain constant to fulfil the wants and needs of the infant. To bring the enforcement of this good maternal role, analysts attach the logic that if a selfless mother provides her care and irrepressible love to her child, it brings tranquillity and if a mother fails to provide this a child can react violently. The prescription by analysts for "good-enough mothering" entails primary identification, empathy and considering the infant an integral part of the self (Chodorow, 1978). An important aspect arises that letting loose the cord of the child is just by its mother necessary as a mother's considering her child the integral part at the beginning. Universally analysts overview that a mother and an infant's relationship is an instinctually interdependent relationship where the mother reciprocates the child's primary object love and its ignorance of reality. The crisis found in the relationship of mother and infant is because both of them deny the reality principle, acquire instant gratification in each other's company and deny separateness which turns into oneness. When a mother gives birth to an infant, she leaves behind her 'self' and constructs a new one with her child. By experiencing oneness with her child, a mother feels unexpected emotions and love for the child.

In a mother-daughter relationship, a mother plays an important role in creating the concept of *self* or "I am". In that phase of infancy, a child constructs its own identity vis-a-vis her mother and begins questioning *who I am*. A daughter's infantile phase in which her relationship with

her mother constructs her own concepts of other women, emotions for her mother and later object-relationships (Chodorow, 1978). A girl's sexual identity crisis is resolved by a girl's first object relationship and the castration complex not by its biological anatomy. (Freud, 1933) A daughter retains her social, gender and core self-identity in relation to her mother. A daughter finds the sole place for attachment before developing ego in her mother and acknowledges her as an appendage (Chodorow, 1978). An infant's development takes place in relation to another object that is its mother. As mentioned earlier, the early mother-infant relationship introduces itself from the social aspects of development.

Although this relationship has been the most crucial part of the world literature yet created by and for the patriarchy, leaving behind the class of women. With the publication of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* and Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*, a discourse about motherhood was created by women who felt mothering and shared the experiences of others. This pioneering work inspired women across the world, and consequently, Indian women writers 'hold their pen to portray the real picture of a mother-daughter relationship.

In the vast tapestry of Indian English literature, one recurring motif that captivates readers' attention is the intricate and often tumultuous relationship between mothers and daughters. Spanning across various genres and periods, these narratives delve deep into the complexities, conflicts, and deep-seated bonds that characterize this primal connection. From traditional familial structures to modern interpretations, Indian literature in English offers a rich and nuanced portrayal of the mother-daughter dynamic, reflecting the societal, cultural, and psychological nuances of the Indian context.

At the heart of many narratives lies the tension between tradition and modernity, a dichotomy that shapes the experiences of both mothers and daughters. In works such as Anita Desai's *"Fasting, Feasting"* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *"The Palace of Illusions,"* we witness the clash between the aspirations of the younger generation and the expectations entrenched in centuries-old customs and societal norms. These authors navigate the complexities of identity, autonomy, and agency, portraying daughters striving to carve out their paths amidst the weight of familial obligations and societal pressures.

In Indian culture, the mother is often portrayed as a figure of sacrifice and unconditional love, yet these narratives also unravel the complexities beneath this facade. Arundhati Roy's *"The God of Small Things"* offers a poignant exploration of the bond between Ammu and her daughter Estha and Rahel, highlighting the burden of

societal stigma, familial estrangement, and the consequences of defying societal norms. Through Roy's lyrical prose, we witness the profound impact of maternal love tainted by societal constraints, ultimately leading to tragic consequences.

However, not all portrayals of the mother-daughter relationship in Indian English literature are steeped in conflict and tragedy. Writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, in "*The Namesake*," and Kiran Desai, in "*The Inheritance of Loss*," offer more nuanced depictions that transcend the conventional narrative tropes. Through their works, they explore the complexities of migration, displacement, and cultural identity, weaving intricate narratives that illuminate the evolving nature of familial bonds across generations. In these narratives, the mother-daughter relationship serves as a conduit for exploring themes of cultural assimilation, intergenerational conflicts, and the quest for belonging in a rapidly changing world.

Moreover, Indian English literature also embraces the diversity of experiences within the mother-daughter relationship, offering narratives that reflect the intersectionality of gender, class, caste, and regional identities. Writers like Shashi Deshpande, in "*That Long Silence*," and Manju Kapur, in "*Difficult Daughters*," delve into the intricacies of domesticity, patriarchy, and the quest for self-actualization within the confines of familial expectations. Through their nuanced portrayals, they challenge conventional notions of womanhood and motherhood, offering a more inclusive and expansive representation of female experiences in Indian society.

In conclusion, the portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship in Indian English literature serves as a mirror to the complexities and contradictions inherent in Indian society. Through a myriad of narratives, authors navigate the terrain of tradition and modernity, sacrifice and autonomy, love and conflict, offering readers a glimpse into the kaleidoscopic tapestry of human relationships. These narratives not only enrich our understanding of familial dynamics but also shed light on the universal themes of love, longing, and the perennial quest for identity and belonging.

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