

## DAUGHTER-PARENT RELATIONSHIP IN THE SELECT INDIAN ENGLISH FEMALE NOVELISTS

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### ABSTRACT

*The daughter-parent relationship in literary fiction has received increasing attention in the last decade. However, the literature concerning the normal daughter-parent dyad has never been formally studied, evaluated and summarized. Two predominant groups of contemporary theories, one based in psychoanalysis and the other in social learning theory, have focused on this relationship and, among other things, attempted to explain why girls tend to become like their mothers. The psychoanalytic theorists tend to emphasize daughters' unconscious internalization of maternal values and behaviours. The social learning theorists suggest that girls learn from mothers and try to be like their mothers, by consistently and positively being reinforced when they imitate their mothers' behaviour. The unique aspects of the daughter-parent relationship have psychoanalytic models. The mother is early caregiver and primary source of identification for all children. However, often if not always, a young girl's identification with her mother continues throughout life, whereas a young boy's identification with his mother is broken and switched to his father (or another male figure.) A daughter continues to identify with her care-giving mother thereby maintaining the mother daughter relationship while establishing her identity. Nancy Chodorow affirms that because of their prolonged identification with mothers, daughters generally perceive themselves as more like their mothers. The male child is still the longed for child; the desire for the male child has led to what Geeta Aravamudan describes as the "disappearing daughters" syndrome.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Daughter-Parent Dyad, Psychoanalysis, Social Learning, Disappearing Daughters*

### INTRODUCTION

In the past, the work by Indian women authors has always been undervalued because of certain patriarchal assumptions. However, the Indian women novelists, particularly of the 1980's onwards have gained worldwide recognition. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women toward conflicted female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. In contrast to earlier novels, female characters from the 1980s onwards generally assert themselves and defy marriage and motherhood. Modern women writers have articulated woman's aspirations, her professional endeavours and her newly formed relationship with man and the changed perceptions of sexuality in their novels. Authors such as Anita Desai (1937-), Shashi Deshpande (1938-), Bharti Mukherjee (1940-2017), Manju Kapur (1948-), Shobha De (1948-), Githa Hariharan (1954), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (1956), Namita Gokhle (1956-2016), Arundhati Roy (1961-), Anita Nair (1966-), and others have presented various configurations and implications of the daughter-parent connection and modes of resistance to patriarchal norms.

The subject of the daughter-parent relationship and its representation in the novels of Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Githa Hariharan, and Anita Nair may be said to be a recurrent motif but scarcely examined. In the fiction of these writers, the mother-daughter relationship is depicted, more often than not, as a fraught relationship that questions the idea of motherhood. Indian women's fiction in English in the ninety nineties (1990s) has increasingly questioned the idea of motherhood and its cultural representations prevalent in the Indian society. Father-daughter attachment pattern and its influence on daughter's development rather the daughter-father dyad is less explored as compared to daughter-mother dyad. Many studies have focused on mother-daughter relationship and very few have focused on father-daughter relationship. But now it seems interest is growing in this area too. The daughter-father relationship has a significant influence on how a woman chooses and develops relationships with other men in her life. As a result, she may become patterned to think that all men will treat her in the same manner or more importantly, that all men should treat her that way. As a consequence, she is more likely to choose men who can or will give her what her father gave her.

Anita Desai is a prominent face among the Indian English novelists of her generation. Many research scholars have explored different aspects of Anita Desai's multifaceted writing. They include areas such as feminist approach, the philosophical approach and psychological one. They have analysed her fictional works in great detail highlighting both the strength and weaknesses of her writing. However, there has been a dearth of critical analysis with reference to the daughter-parent relationship. M. K. Naik in his book *A History of Indian English Literature* remarks: Anita Desai unravels the indirect involutions of deep feelings with detail and finesses and her ability to suggest the changing aspects of nature matched with human moods is another of her possessions, as per Naik "though her easy mastery of the language and her penchant for image and symbol occasionally result in preciosity and overwriting."

Similarly, we come across an impressive display of reviews on Anita Desai's novel *Cry, the Peacock*. In one such review *The Times Literary Supplement*, London points out, "Maya's extreme sensitivity never alienates the reader because it is rendered in terms of measurable human loneliness...How well Desai does in the business of carrying her narrative through to a satisfactory even explosive end." *Statesman* points out, "Anita Desai creates a stained glass landscape with details of images, colours and odours... *Cry, the Peacock* is the product of a mellowed craftswoman."

Twinkle B. Manavar in her critical essay "Man-Woman Relationship in Anita Desai's Novel" says most marriages prove to be unions of intellectual and emotional incompatibility. Men are oriented to be sensible and matter of fact while women are labelled as over-romantic and emotional.

We come across a good number of reviews on Githa Hariharan's novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Most of the reviews give a brief outline of the story and few critical insights. In one such review, *India today* points out, "Hariharan's sensitive novel...ought to be read by every thinking Indian, affianced, married or separated. It shows, with exceptional fictional skill, the subtle and everyday way in which women are bludgeoned to play male-scripted subordinate roles."

In "Marriage: A Boon or Bane? A Study of Bharati Mukherji's *Wife* and Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*," T. Sarda states that the title of *The Thousand Faces of Night* is also important since it means the innumerable ways in which the unconscious mind of the protagonist works. "The term 'night,'" as per Sarda "refers to the unpredictable ways in which the mind of Devi works." Her deeds are guided by spontaneous decisions which spring from the dictates of a bottomless world. These internal laws are at loggerhead with the public system that marriage demands.

Shashi Deshpande is quite familiar to the readers of the domestic novels. Critical tendencies by and large have located Shashi Deshpande's novels within traditional and more stereotypical purviews of feminist perspectives. One of the earliest full length studies on the writer is Sarabjit K. Sandhu's *The Image of Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* and is valuable in its position of being ranked as one of the earliest critical works though it largely focuses on the image of women without seeking a deeper and comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural processes that go into the making of that image. *The Indian Women Novelists* Vol. 5, by R. K. Dhawan compiles several essays on Shashi Deshpande which focus centrally on the woman factor - love and death, marriage, selfhood and Indian womanhood at large. The emphasis inevitably falls on such issues held important to a woman. Such critical stances stand the danger of being repetitive and of a narrowed vision. Viney Kirpal and Mukta Atrey have attempted a full length study of Shashi Deshpande's fiction in their work entitled *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study of Her Fiction*, In which they locate the novelist in a gendered light while associating her works with a feminist orientation.

Jasbir Jain's critical study entitled *Gendered Realities, Human Spaces* marks a visible shift from conventional approaches to Deshpande's fiction as the critic engages in a close reading of Deshpande's fiction beyond the stereotypes of feminism and post-colonialism. Jain's is an aesthetically enriched evaluation which opens out Deshpande's fiction to socio-cultural histories. In her attempt to liberate Deshpande from the confining image of a feminist writer, Jain examines psychological inputs, deployment of myth and native concerns, narrative strategies including the poetics of loss.

Manju Kapur's novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998) explores the mother-daughter relationship through three generations of women. *Difficult Daughters* gives dense presentations of the social world of the early twentieth century when discourses of gender and the 'women's question' was a highly debated subject in both the public and private spheres. The debates around the question of the construction of gender norms and what role women could play in public life affected women in a number of ways.

Dipika Sahai's article "Self Assertiveness Leading to Defiance in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*," observes that Virmati has been brought up in a family where the woman has no identity of her own, no right to higher education. She wants to study and have career but is restricted by social conventions of the time and place. As a mutineer she rebels and insists on her right to higher education and is aware of her emotional needs. Her self-declaration goes to the extent of having illicit love with the married Professor whom she later marries. As per Dipika "The hardship and suffering involved in fighting against an established order, the shattering experience of rejection by her family on becoming the second wife of the professor, and the resultant alienation from society forms the theme of the novel." Her life is a continuous struggle. Paradoxically, she wants to set up an order through disobedience. She rebels against the customary and active moral codes and social norms.

In "Women's Vulnerability to Violence as Portrayed in the Novels of Manju Kapur" Arpita Ghosh states that Virmati fell prey to Professor Harish's desire. Gradually but surely such desire swallowed up Virmati; she transgressed the conventional laws and got involved in an illicit affair with Harish both physically and mentally.

Anita Nair is another contemporary author in the burgeoning area of Indian women's fiction in English. Nair is noted for using mythology to connect her specific characters and locations to universal truths and themes. Binod Mishra in an essay entitled "Resurrection of Self a Study of Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*" in an anthology *Indian Writings in English* states that Desai's novels depict the mental conflicts afflicting their heroines whereas Nair makes her characters suffer and enables them to come out of it. Desai's heroines sulk, sob and submerge themselves in their calamity but for Nair's characters, their sufferings become their strength and weapon to fight out their predicaments.

The subject of the daughter-parent relationship and its representation in Indian women's fiction in English may be said to be a recurrent motif but hardly examined. The novels of Anita Desai, Githa Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and Anita Nair have social, political and cultural dimensions which need to be explored to see how they engage with the problems of daughter-parent relationship in contemporary Indian society. It would be interesting to learn whether texts like *Cry, the Peacock*, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, *The Binding Vine*, *Difficult Daughters* and *Ladies Coupe* written by Anita Desai, Githa Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and Anita Nair respectively can be treated as examples in which daughter-parent relationship is a pivot. These novels reflect the tendency of women characters to hold on to their roots and although there has been much theorizing on gender and nation, the constitution of the female subject within the context of societal and family relationships has not received scholarly attention in women's studies in India. The devaluation of women – mothers and daughters – in patriarchy still continues and the male child is still the longed for child which reveals the complications under which female subjectivity has to survive in the Indian society. But motherhood itself as a lived identity of women has not been examined with any degree of depth. Given the social and cultural milieu of Indian patriarchy and its devaluation of women, the mother-daughter bond becomes a useful lens to examine the social construction of motherhood in India. The relative obscurity of the mother-daughter bond in literary cultural discussions has prompted feminists to term the mother-daughter bond as a vanished convention.

Within the context of daughter-parent dyad, Anita Desai is one of the prominent contemporary women writers in Indian writing in English. Her novels *Cry, the Peacock* has been widely studied and analysed from the angles of feminist inclination, male-female dichotomy and the tension between husband and wife. It would be interesting to analyse this novel from daughter-parent relationship perspective. Githa Hariharan's novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* has also not been studied from this perspective. Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine* has not been analysed from the daughter-parent relationship perspective so far. Manju Kapur's novel *Difficult Daughters* has also not been analysed from daughter-parent relationship perspective. Anita Nair is a relatively new writer among the authors selected in this study. One hardly comes across any substantial work carried out on Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* apart from few isolated articles.

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