



FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP IN SHOBHAA DE'S NOVEL STARRY NIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

This research paper analyses father-daughter relationship in De's novel highlights the repression faced by women within the patriarchal enclosure. It presents various suppressive factors of female experiences owing to male oppression. De illuminates the certainty of her understanding of women's suppression and her vision of strong women. She also represents the bitterness women experience due to men's threat to their existence affected by this patriarchal mentality that considers woman inferior and sees her nature afflicted with genuine defectiveness. This research paper further reveals how De's women, because of suppression by fathers and father-figures, show resentment towards them initially, but later, when they emerge as new women, behave in a responsible manner and even sympathize with their suppressors if they find them in helpless situations. This awareness of responsibility gives new meaning to their lives. The paper has been discussed in light of Shobhaa De's novel Starry Nights.

KEY WORDS: Male ideologies, Patriarchal mentality, Father-figures

Since childhood, women have been nurtured to believe that the male head of the family has an absolute authority in all matters, whereas the woman ought to play a submissive role. In this context, Anees Jung makes an observation regarding the role of a father: "Father, the only familiar male figure, who dominated a world outside, also filled the inside forcefully and invisibly. He embodied the ideal, exhibited courage to look into the future, nourished the tenuous links between the outside and the inside and helped create balances that spelled harmony within the family" (15, 1986).

She makes this crucial discovery during her childhood when she realizes a woman's confinement into a sphere created and ordained for her by men. Inadvertently, the woman as a child enters into the realm of male domination first due to her father. Only in her father, for the first time, she perceives a man of order and dominating nature. She is avowed to learn through her mother as how a woman is weighed with submissive roles. She is also frightened with nervousness that she will have to accept this patriarchal superiority. In this regard, Beauvoir sums up the views of Adler:

The place the father holds in the family, the universal predominance of males, her own education—everything confirms her in her belief in masculine superiority. Later on, when she takes part in sexual relations, she finds a new humiliation in the coital posture that places woman underneath the man. She reacts through the 'masculine protest': either she endeavours to masculinize herself, or she makes use of her feminine weapons to wage war upon the male (1983, 74).

Specially, for a girl child, the first man in her life to whom she interacts is her father. She carefully and minutely examines her father's behaviour, personality and his attitude for his wife. So, father, the protector and creator of the girl child, is always subjected to be followed, examined and analysed by her daughter. Hence, the role a father plays becomes the pivot in developing the daughter's personality.

In this way, a girl realizes that it is her father whose will govern the essential patterns of life, whereas, her mother, like a dependent doll, has no claim on the house, which she has helped to create. Her joy and love are bound forever for her husband and sons. In addition, her dreams for herself remain unimportant in the house with her "silent energy" (Jung 1986, 20). In terms of equality, her mother and her father do not appear to be the same. A girl, who eventually turns into a woman, finds it difficult to accept this discrimination between her father and mother. A reality that has its own rhythm leaves a girl child on the path of confusion and animosity for this male domination. As a result, something unvoiced chokes her throat and cause her rebel against this discrimination. Having sensed this inequality between her parents, a daughter starts to think of her own existence.

In this vein, Sigmund Freud conjectures that women who are biologically and fundamentally different from men are inferior to them physically (in sexual capacity and equipment), emotionally (in stability and control), and ethically (in the sense of honesty and justice). Therefore, women, because of her inferior, childish, and helpless nature, should try to get her life's fulfilment in accepting her natural inferiority. Freud relates this hatred of a girl to 'penis envy.' For him, the girl's lack of penis gives a feeling of inferiority complex in her. He explains: "The girl extends this feeling to a belief that all females are inferior, and since the group of 'all females' includes her mother, she grows to regard her with contempt as well" (qtd. in Caplan 1981, 8). Due to the dissatisfaction that like her father and brother, they do not have penis, they get "sexual sickness" (Friedan 1965, 118) and secretly women who want to be man's equal disregard the view to be an object in the life of man. Freud who equates, "... 'Femininity' with 'passivity', and 'masculinity' with 'activity' not only in the sexual sphere, but in all sphere of life" (Friedan 1965, 120) states his views that "... women should be able to fulfill themselves as wives and mothers if only they could be analyzed out of their 'masculine strivings,' their 'penis envy'" (Friedan 1965, 122).

This type of attitudinal development, aggravated by the effect of media, family's treatment, society's sex discrimination, all cause frustration and subsequent rebellion in the minds of women. A girl who expects her mother to protest against her father and patriarchal society, finds that her mother, in spite of giving priority to her daughter, has unlimited affection for her son. This is altogether the most humiliating and the most baffling situation for a girl. According to her, her mother should help a daughter in providing all those things, which she herself cannot get from this patriarchal society; and she should be delighted to give an autonomous life to her daughter. To the contrary, as Beauvoir observes:

The mother, as we shall see, is secretly hostile to her daughter's liberation, and she takes to bullying her more or less deliberately; but the boy's effort to become a man is respected, and he is granted much liberty. The girl is required to stay at home, her coming and going are watched: she is not encouraged to take charge of her own amusements and pleasures (1983, 358).

Through her mother, the girl, who has been perceiving male domination, now finds herself on the same footing of male suppression. Another problem faced in a girl's life is when in her childhood, she is not given the same encouragement given to her brother. Like her brothers, she also desires for so many things but, in contrast, "She is expected to be also a woman, and she has to add the duties of her professional study to those implied in her femininity" (Beauvoir 1983, 357). She has been convinced of male superiority and taught to look at her life's interest in becoming a good wife or a good mother. So in her childish image, male prestige becomes a most attractive thing and she begins to think "men are surely masters of the world" (Beauvoir 1983, 352). A girl who is torn between this discrimination of male independence as a superior or powerful being and feminine submission as a weak or inferior creature, does not become ready to keep herself in inessential position. Oscillating between these painful dilemmas, she tries to imitate her father in claiming to be an active and free object.

On discovering that her father is differently treated since he holds power, she herself begins to seek the ways in order to get that power. Subsequently, she gets the idea that whatever her father does is due to his autonomous personality. She avows herself that in her future, like her father, she will be also become a successful and essential being. This involves the idea of holding power through economic independence, social and moral freedom, rejecting ideological roles for women, and above all, not to be treated as a dependent person accepting her feminine weakness in every field of life.

By becoming productive, and conscious about their existence, a woman tries to come out from her condition of vassalage through economic freedom. In this male-centred social structure, she is struggling to be equal like her self-dependent father and brother. As a critic remarks: "In role performance, it may take the form of altering the autonomous pattern in male tasks towards a syncratic pattern, altering the traditional male supremacy in all decision areas into some degree of jointness especially in areas of relevance to them. Similarly, it helps to promote a measure of equalitarian outlook and behaviour in the life of spouses" (M. Indiradevi 1987, 176).

The paper has been discussed in light of ShobhaaDe's novel *Starry Night*. It is quite understandable that in the novels of ShobhaaDe, she has made her women characters proud of their self-sufficiency by which they hold control over men. They also try to gain all other advantages, which men enjoy from their childhood. In this process, they find themselves unable to maintain cordial relationships with their fathers.

It is true that when a girl child does not get certain needs and demands fulfilled while growing up, frustration occurs in her life. Subsequently, the child develops aversion for those persons who are responsible for her frustration. In *Starry Nights*, De represents this conflict between Aasha Rani and her father. In this novel, Aasha Rani feels aggression and envy towards her father who, she thinks, has spoilt her and her mother's lives. Although towards the end of the novel she accepts her father in her life, yet in the beginning of the novel, one can easily sense her bitterness and hatred for her father. What is still more serious is that she holds her father responsible for destroying her life. Actually, Aasha Rani alias Vizi Iynger, is brought to the harsh world of cinema at a very young age. When she is sent to Kishanbai for his physical gratification, she, as a small child, hugging a doll innocently tells him about her childhood: "I never had anything to play with—no toys, nothing' . . . The father who had deserted them. The mother who had been left with three girls to raise. The poverty. The deprivation. The struggle" (SN, 4). Aasha who grows with the feeling of an unwanted, bastard child, is compelled to act in blue films due to financial problems. She, who is not interested in exposing her in sickening films, does not find anybody to listen to her cry of protest. Her mother convinces her by saying that these movies will not be shown in the theatres and nobody will know that she had done these films. Compulsion to seek financial support for family and her father's indifference, force her to work among sexually starved people of cinema world. She feels that it is her father, who used to hold power, has played with her mother's life. Moreover, her mother's enslavement brings her to this film-world for the needs and demands of the family. The mother goads Aasha Rani who refuses to show her body before men: "You just pretend and follow the director's orders. Close your eyes and think of other things. Think of your poor sister and your *amma* struggling to make you a big star. Do you know Sudha hasn't paid her fees? Her dance teacher was also asking for money. We need pressure cooker, come on, there's a sweet girl" (SN, 53).

Thus, the girl who does not wish to sell her body is sacrificed due to family's problems. Although Aasha reluctantly concedes that her mother wants her to do sexual favours, yet she is filled with a sense of humiliation for doing them. She claims that her father, who should be aware of their needs, has ditched them deliberately. He, after using her mother, has abandoned her with the children to face a life of hunger and humiliation. Her hatred for her father is so strong that she is not even interested in meeting him at his deathbed. When her sister Sudha requests her to meet him, Aasha disgustingly tells her:

'But why should I go to see him? I haven't seen him in years. Since I was a child. He hasn't bothered about any of us either. Now that he's dying, why does he care whether we see him or not? . . . 'Let him die like a dog. Why should I care? Did he care when we were starving? Did he come to our help when *amma* had to go around begging for work? I have no feelings for him. My father died long ago. . . . I never want to see *appa*'s face again. Not even at his funeral' (SN, 72).

Her father's figure generates in her general animosity for men. Aasha Rani believes that it is a man's superiority that enables him to escape from the punishment of his wrong doings. Her father established an illicit relationship with her mother and left her to face all the consequences of his immoral relationship. Aasha not only sees this injustice in her mother's life but also realizes man's superiority in her own life. Hence, despite her physical relationship with different men, Aasha does not mentally accept male domination. In the field of cinema, she shuns working in dirty films and decides to beat men at their own game. Kishanbhai realizes "... Aasha Rani's thinly-disguised hatred for men. Perhaps it had something to do with *appa* and the way he'd mistreated her mother. Or may be she felt soiled, used, exploited by them" (SN, 8).

In this manner, her mother's life becomes the carrier of the disconcerting injustice of male suppression. Through this, Aasha Rani gains the capacity to identify her resemblance with her mother, both in terms of physical and emotional harassment. These experiences breed in her life the feelings of hostility for men. Not only her father's illicit relationship with her mother makes her aware of sexual harassment, along with that, at her early age, her mistreatment by her father's friend adds to it. Being her father's friend, Gopalkrishnan should have treated Aasha as his daughter, yet at the age of seven, he had her as a prey for his sexual-fulfilment. Aasha felt so horrified at his sexual act: "... there was no rule that a friend of one's father was necessarily a gentlemen with paternal inclinations. On the contrary, she'd experienced distinctly non-paternal vibes from *appa*'s friends ever since she could remember" (SN, 196).

This childhood incident haunts her mind concluding that a man does not leave any chance to dishonour a woman, and thus she grows up with an oppressive feeling of male exploitation. She was deprived of love from her father as a small child. Had she found some love even from other father-figures she could have gained happiness. But, even these father-figures whom she trusts, try to misuse her in the name of fatherly affection. And this causes in her disgust for all men. In an Indian context, after marriage, the father-in-law takes the place of a father. A girl learns that she has to respect him as her father. However, in a party in which Aasha's in-law's members also join, her father-in-law, a man of sixty, tries to have sexual relationship with her. Aasha who sees "undisguised desire in his eyes" (SN, 204) describes how she underwent a sexual encounter with him:

She felt her father-in-law's hot breath on her neck. 'You're a sexy woman,' he said his eyes gleaming. Reaching across the small folding table he placed his hand over hers. 'Jay is a lucky guy. We always thought he was a sissy, shy with the ladies, if you know what I mean. And look at you! I mean I'm sure you need a really hot-blooded man in your bed.' His hand over hers tightened its grip as he squeezed it suggestively. She felt his knees rub against hers—the rough texture of his jeans cutting through the flimsy layers of her sari (SN, 204).

Considering the need for love and nurturance, when the children meet their needs, they feel intensely grateful and protected; but when their needs are thwarted, they feel extremely angry with their parents, whom they have identified as persons who are supposed to meet these needs. Hence, lack of love in father-daughter relationship gives rise to hostility between them. In brief, De has attributed daughter's hostility towards her father for his failure to give support and love to her.

In this novel, *Starry Nights*, Aasha, in her whole life, felt the lack of fatherly support. In her life, on the name of support and love, men of her father's age try to humiliate her emotionally, mentally and physically. By these bitter experiences, her hatred for men gets intensified manifold. Frustrated because of bitter experiences in her life, Aasha develops disgust for her father. However, when she realizes that her father has changed and his health has deteriorated badly, she, as a mature woman, changes her attitude towards him. Her father's confession that it was his wrong decision to have left them in the lurch makes Aasha to see her father differently and gently. Having a matured vision, she transforms bitterness into affection. In order to accept her parents fully, she forgets all the humiliating memories caused by them. She feels: "The anger, the sense of betrayal—had vanished. Not just towards him, but *amma* too. It was just that her parents didn't know better. They'd tried in their own foolish way to bring up the children as doughty street-fighters" (SN, 228). In addition, when she recognizes that her father really needs her, she is full of support to him. With this maturity, she decides to bring up her daughter Sasha, not only in order to survive in her life but also to give a model way of parenting that will be governed by love and affection.

Thus, the paper is an attempt to show the dilemma and predicament faced by women within the patriarchal enclosure. It explicates the tension mainly between father and daughter relationship. An analysis of the dominators—in the form of fathers and father-figures, and the subordinate victims—in the form of daughters, is carried out. Further, the research paper points out how and why this tenuous relationship fails.

But it ends up by showing how this failure helps the suppressed women to see the relationship from a different perspective and accept it in a renewed manner.

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