The Mother-Daughter Dynamic in Select Indian Fiction

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ABSTRACT

The birth of a daughter in an Indian household triggers a complex interplay of emotions and cultural norms. This paper explores the nuanced dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship in Indian literature, focusing on Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things.* Through an analysis of the protagonists Virmati and Ammu's experiences, it aims to address a research gap concerning personal development, identity formation, and familial dynamics. Utilizing Showalter's feminist theory and contemporary research on mother-daughter bonds, the paper investigates how maternal influence shapes protagonists' choices and self-perception. It scrutinizes the impact of societal expectations and patriarchal norms on familial dynamics, particularly in romantic decisions. Moreover, it examines instances of rebellion against traditional gender roles and their repercussions within the family. By delving into familial interactions and external relationships, the study unveils the broader societal implications of protagonists' experiences. It enriches the discourse on familial influence, romantic decisions, and gender dynamics in Indian society, offering a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationships shaping individual identity and societal norms.

INTRODUCTION

The birth of a daughter in an Indian household elicits a complex array of emotions. While the parents experience joy at her arrival, this happiness is inevitably tinged with a poignant awareness that, in the future, the child will eventually 'belong to another home.' The prevailing societal perception labels the girl child as 'paraya dhan,' translating to foreign wealth. This sentiment is deeply ingrained in Indian culture, evident in proverbs and songs across various languages, all reinforcing this prevailing mindset. A poignant example can be found in a Tamil movie song that encapsulates this cultural perspective:

'As per the law, a man has but one house. But a frog and a woman, both have two homes.'

The lyrics not only highlight the societal acceptance of men having multiple homes discreetly but also draw a parallel between women and frogs, underscoring the profound significance and transformative nature of the two homes in a woman's life. It is noteworthy that, within this context, neither house truly belongs to the woman; rather, she navigates the complexities of relationships and societal expectations within the confines of spaces where her agency is often compromised.

This comparison also underscores the societal expectations and constraints placed on women, emphasizing their dual roles and allegiances. The notion of 'two homes' becomes symbolic not only of physical spaces but also of the emotional and societal expectations that shape a woman's life. It reflects the complex interplay between tradition, societal norms, and the individual experiences of women in navigating these dual responsibilities.

The mother-daughter dynamic is a recurrent theme in Indian fiction, offering a nuanced exploration of familial relationships, cultural nuances, and societal expectations. Many Indian authors delve into the complexities of this bond, capturing the intricacies and challenges faced within the country's diverse cultural landscape.

Vandi Maadu Ettu vechu from Kizhakku Semaiyilae

This mother-daughter bond holds immense significance in literature, impacting storytelling, character development, and the exploration of human emotions. Its universal nature makes it relatable across cultures and time periods, providing a platform to explore the inherent complexity, love, conflict, and myriad emotions within familial bonds. This relationship plays a crucial role in the formation of individual identity. Characters often grapple with questions of self-discovery, independence, and the influence of maternal figures on their sense of self. Cultural expectations, traditions, and societal norms often shape the mother-daughter relationship.

Literature serves as a mirror that reflects and critiques these cultural elements, providing insights into the impact of societal values on familial connections. As literature has historically been dominated by male perspectives, the exploration of the mother-daughter relationship offers a unique opportunity to delve into an entirely female experience. When the relationship is explored by female authors, it becomes a platform for them to articulate and share an entirely female perspective on womanhood, motherhood, and familial connections.

The mother-daughter relationship is fertile ground for exploring generational conflicts and the evolving dynamics between different eras. Literature often delves into the challenges and misunderstandings that arise between mothers and daughters as they navigate changing social landscapes. The complexities within the mother-daughter relationship create narrative tension, driving the plot forward. The conflicts and resolutions between these characters contribute to the emotional depth and engagement of the storyline. The mother-daughter relationship is often used as a powerful metaphor or symbol in literature. It can represent broader themes such as nurture, growth, continuity, or the cyclical nature of life.

Through the lens of the mother-daughter relationship, literature can offer social commentary on issues such as gender roles, expectations placed on women, and the evolving nature of familial structures. In essence, the mother-daughter relationship in literature serves as a rich and multifaceted narrative element that allows authors to explore the complexities of human connections, identity, and the ever-evolving nature of familial bonds.

In Indian fiction, the mother-daughter relationship is often portrayed as a multifaceted connection that reflects the broader social and cultural dynamics. Authors such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Arundhati Roy, and Jhumpa Lahiri, among others, have skillfully woven narratives that depict the interplay of tradition, modernity, and generational differences within families. These literary works often highlight the conflicting expectations and aspirations of mothers and daughters, grappling with societal norms and personal desires. The stories may explore the tension between traditional values and individual autonomy, providing a lens into the evolving roles of women in Indian society.

Moreover, Indian fiction frequently addresses the emotional complexity of the mother-daughter bond, portraying moments of joy, conflict, sacrifice, and resilience. These narratives contribute to a deeper understanding of the familial and cultural factors that shape the identities of women in India. Ultimately, the exploration of the mother-daughter dynamic in Indian fiction serves as a reflection of the broader societal shifts and challenges faced by women. By delving into the intimate and intricate aspects of this relationship, these literary works offer readers insights into the evolving roles of women in the cultural and familial fabric of India.

It's intriguing to note that several prominent women in Indian mythology are either motherless or have their maternal roles underplayed. For instance, Sita from the epic Ramayana is symbolically connected to the earth, but does not enjoy maternal nurturing. Similarly, in Kalidasa's epic, Shakuntala is portrayed as the daughter of the celestial Menaka, with her mother's role diminished after birth. It's challenging to determine whether this narrative choice reflects a conscious decision or a creative oversight in depicting the maternal aspect within these myths. The absence of a maternal figure may indeed have influenced their psyche, raising questions about whether their destinies might have unfolded differently under different circumstances.

Feminist literature's evolution has paved the way for a deeper exploration of the mother-daughter dynamic. As feminist perspectives gained prominence, authors began scrutinizing traditional gender roles, allowing for a nuanced examination of familial relationships. This literary shift sheds light on societal expectations, generational shifts, and power dynamics within the mother-daughter bond, enriching narratives with diverse understandings of women's experiences.

The period surrounding India's independence and partition (1940s and 50s) brought forth feminist literature that explored the impact of these historical events on women's lives. Ismat Chughtai and Qurratulain Hyder were notable contributors who addressed themes of identity and displacement.

Post-independence, writers like Mahasweta Devi and Amrita Pritam delved into the complexities of gender, caste, and class. Their works often critiqued societal structures and underscored the need for women's empowerment. For example, in a narrative of motherhood and mortality by Mahasweta Devi, we encounter Sujata, the central figure known as the "mother of no. 1084,"a deceased individual at the morgue. Through Sujata's memories, the fate of No. 1084, her son Broti, unfolds - a young idealist tragically lost during the Naxal movement in Bengal.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the influence of the global second wave feminist movement on Indian literature. Writers like Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy explored themes of patriarchy, gender inequality, and women's agency. Contemporary feminist literature in India reflects a commitment to intersectionality, acknowledging the interconnectedness of gender with other social categories. Authors like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Meena Kandasamy explore even more diverse experiences and perspectives of women, like women in Indian diaspora and domestic violence.

The evolution of feminist Indian literature reflects an ongoing conversation that engages with the complexities of gender, identity, and societal structures. The diversity of voices and themes within this literary landscape continues to expand, mirroring the multifaceted experiences of women in India.

An exploration into the special relationship between a mother and her daughter began with Freud himself, who said that within the mother-daughter relationship, the mother plays a pivotal role in shaping the daughter's sense of self or "I am." During infancy, the daughter starts constructing her identity in relation to her mother, prompting introspection into the question of who she is. Consequently, her resolution of sexual identity crisis is influenced by her initial connection with her mother as the primary object and the castration complex, rather than being solely determined by biological anatomy (Freud, 1933).

Moreover, a growing body of research underscores the profound impact that the quality of a mother-daughter relationship can have on a daughter's self-esteem. Unlike individuals who grapple with conflict and negativity in their relationships with their mothers, those fortunate to experience a positive and supportive bond tend to demonstrate elevated levels of self-esteem (Nikita Singh, 2023). This positive correlation highlights the significance of the mother-daughter dynamic in shaping not only emotional well-being but also the overall development and self-perception of the daughter. The nurturing and affirming aspects of a supportive maternal relationship play a pivotal role in forging a healthy sense of self-worth and confidence in the daughter's journey toward personal growth and fulfillment.

The work of motherhood is burdened with predetermined notions and ideologies. Adrienne Rich, in her work *Of Woman Born,* asserts that motherhood, often overlooked in historical narratives of conquest, serfdom, wars, treaties, exploration, and imperialism, possesses its own history and ideology. Rich emphasizes that motherhood is more foundational than tribalism or nationalism (Rich 33).

In the realm of Indian literature, mothers are frequently depicted as revered figures, embodying a divine essence and renowned for their unwavering commitment to self-sacrifice. (Shivani Sharma, 2021). This portrayal has ingrained in cultural narratives, shaping the archetype of the idealized mother who places the welfare of her family above all else. In Bharti Mukherjee's *Tiger's Daughters*, Arati emerges as an exemplary figure, effectively navigating her triple roles as a daughter-in-law, a wife, and a mother, serving as a role model for others in these diverse roles. (Manohar D Dugaje, 2019)

This type of portrayal is also seen in Tagore's *Gora,* where Anandamoyi is portrayed as the "face of the motherland," aspiring to nurture humanity without the constraints of religions, customs, and societies. The significance of motherhood in the cultural life of India becomes evident in *Gora,* where the iconic image of a real mother holds considerable importance, particularly within the context of Bengal or India. (Karami, Faghfori and Zodi, 2016)

Straying from this conventional portrayal of motherhood often invites the scrutiny of literary works, which tend to spotlight negative outcomes for those who challenge or deviate from these societal expectations. Authors and storytellers have woven narratives that caution against unconventional expressions of motherhood, portraying such departures as disruptive to the established order. Consequently, the archetype of "the mother" becomes not only an idealized figure but also one tethered to societal norms and expectations. Mothers are not depicted as naturally born but rather shaped and constructed in accordance with the patriarchal myth of idealized motherhood (Shivalika Agarwal and Nagendra Kumar, 2023).

The exploration of maternal characters by the writers reinforces the cultural expectation that mothers embody self-sacrifice and conformity to traditional roles, establishing a dichotomy where deviation is met with consequences and societal disapproval. For example, in his analysis presented in the journal "Jhumpa Lahiri's The Lowland: A Critical Analysis," Pius raises questions regarding Gauri's choice to depart from Bela and Subhash, discarding her traditional role as a mother.

However, this scenario slowly changed when female authors began to depart from conventional depictions of enduring, self-sacrificing women. Instead, they portray conflicted female characters engaged in a quest for identity, moving beyond the simplistic categorization of victim status. In contrast to earlier novels, female characters from the 1980s onwards typically assert themselves and challenge societal expectations related to marriage and motherhood. (Ishaq Bhat, 2019)

Another interesting example would be Anita Desai's novels which encapsulate a subjective reality where characters evolve through their own perspectives and those of others, creating a fluid concept of identity, as seen in the character of Uma in her novel *Fasting,Feasting.* Exploring the theme of motherhood within this narrative style necessitates a nuanced examination, unveiling the intricate, multifaceted, and occasionally contradictory dimensions of Indian motherhood.(Ashley Nicole Batts, 2011).

In India, the mother-daughter relationship is further complicated by the fact that the birth of a son is preferred over that of a daughter. Mothers-in-law have a significant role to play in this preference for a son. (Marie-Claire Robitaille, Ishita Chatterjee, 2017). Deep-seated stereotypes and gender biases can contribute to the preference for sons. Some mothers-in-law may unconsciously hold traditional beliefs about the capabilities and roles of sons versus daughters-in-law. Societal pressure and expectations can compel mothers-in-law to conform to such traditional norms, even if they may personally hold different views. This pressure can manifest in a preference for sons.

In essence, the cultural perception surrounding the birth of a daughter in an Indian household carries with it a paradox of joy and anticipation, tempered by the societal expectation that she will eventually transition to another home. The metaphorical significance of 'two homes' for women, as depicted in proverbs and songs, serves as a poignant reflection of the intricate dynamics surrounding gender roles and expectations in Indian society.

RESEARCH GAP

The existing literature lacks comprehensive exploration into the intersectionality of personal development, identity formation, and familial dynamics, presenting a research gap that hinders a holistic understanding of how these factors interplay and shape individual experiences within changing familial contexts.

This paper aims to contribute to this gap in the discourse by examining the relationships of Virmati and Harish in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* and Ammu and Velutha in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things.*

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* provides a nuanced exploration of the societal expectations and familial pressures that shape the protagonist, Virmati's choices in her relationships. Virmati, constrained by the norms of her time, navigates the challenges of her mother's expectations while seeking a partner. The paper aims to scrutinize the impact of Virmati's relationship with her mother on her choices, and how societal expectations influence her troubled connection with Harish, shedding light on the complex interplay between maternal influence and romantic decisions.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* presents an intricate web of familial and societal expectations that shape Ammu's choices, particularly in her forbidden relationship with Velutha. Ammu's strained relationship with her mother and the societal prejudices of caste and class contribute to the complexities of her romantic involvement with Velutha. The paper will analyze how Ammu's experiences within the mother-daughter dynamic influence her defiance of societal norms in choosing Velutha, underscoring the intersection of familial expectations and romantic decisions.

Both novels offer rich narratives that highlight the ways in which the mother-daughter relationship intersects with romantic choices. By drawing parallels between Virmati and Ammu, the paper will explore shared themes such as rebellion against societal norms, the impact of familial expectations, and the pursuit of personal agency in the face of societal constraints.

In examining the relationships of Virmati and Harish in *Difficult Daughters* and Ammu and Velutha in *The God of Small Things,* this paper seeks to unravel the intricate connections between the mother-daughter dynamic offering valuable insights to the existing literary discourse on familial influence and romantic decisions.

OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate the nuanced dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship and its impact on the psychological development of the protagonist, with a focus on identifying key factors that contribute to shaping the protagonist's worldview and self-perception.

2. To examine the influence of patriarchal expectations within the familial context, exploring how these expectations contribute to shaping the protagonist's identity and influencing their decision-making processes.

3. To explore instances where the protagonist and other family members go against traditionally accepted gender roles, seeking to understand the motivations, challenges, and consequences of such deviations within the family dynamic.

4. To analyze the role of partners within the family structure and their impact on the protagonist's personal development, identity formation, and negotiation of familial dynamics, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which these external relationships intersect with internal family dynamics.

5. To assess the broader societal implications of the protagonist's experiences, examining how their journey contributes to or challenges prevailing norms related to personal development, gender roles, and familial expectations, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between individual and societal influences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the vast terrain of literary analysis, the lenses of feminism and patriarchy offer distinct yet interwoven perspectives through which to dissect narratives. While feminist critique seeks to unveil the complexity of gender dynamics, with a focus on analyzing the representation and agency of female characters, the patriarchal lens focusses on traditional gender roles and underlying power structures and how these are reinforced or subverted.

In addition to the above, the two works in questions also lend themselves beautifully to the cause of postcolonial feminism. This is a theoretical framework within feminist studies that examines the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, and colonialism. It emerged as a response to the limitations of earlier feminist theories that often failed to address the diverse experiences of women from postcolonial or formerly colonized regions. Key aspects of postcolonial feminism include intersectionality, deconstruction of western feminism, impact of the colonial legacy, female agency and resistance and cultural relativism.

Overall, postcolonial feminism seeks to broaden the scope of feminist discourse by acknowledging the complex and multifaceted nature of women's experiences in a global context, especially in relation to the historical impacts of colonialism.

Significance of Elaine Showalter's Feminist Theory

A noteworthy addition to our analytical toolkit is Elaine Showalter's feminist theory, which provides a structured framework for understanding the evolution of women's literature. Showalter's tripartite model—encompassing the phases of the feminine, feminist, and female—offers a nuanced lens through which to examine the portrayal of women in literature. This not only aligns with the broader feminist discourse but also invites a deeper exploration of the transformative potential inherent in women's narratives.

Rationale for Fictional Selection

The selection of two specific pieces of fiction for scrutiny is not arbitrary but driven by their potential to unravel layers of feminist and patriarchal undercurrents. These works offer a canvas upon which the complexities of gender relationships can be painted, providing ample material for the critical exploration that lies ahead. The characters, plot dynamics, and societal landscapes within these narratives serve as microcosms reflecting broader themes relevant to feminist and patriarchal analyses.

The aim is not only to dissect the narratives for inherent biases and power dynamics but also to weave connections between these analyses and the tenets of Elaine Showalter's feminist theory. This is even more significant considering the fact that both the works were authored by women. Through this exploration, we hope to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender representation in literature, shedding light on the intricate interplay between fiction, societal norms, and feminist thought.

MAIN ANALYSIS

KASTURI, VIRMATI, IDA

'The only thing I had wanted was to not be like my mother.' *(Difficult Daughters,* p.1)

This opening line from Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* is very telling of the conflict within the daughter's psyche in this tale set during the times of Partition. The narrative revolves around Virmati (the mother in question, one that should not emulated as per her daughter, Ida), a young woman living in Amritsar in the 1940s. Virmati is a university student with aspirations beyond the traditional roles assigned to women in her society. Her life takes a dramatic turn when she falls in love with a professor, Harish, who is already married. Their relationship challenges societal norms, and Virmati faces opposition from her family and community.

Virmati is described as being 'dreamy-eyed' for Harish, as portrayed in the scene at university, where she sits on the floor, looking up at Harish with her large eyes.

'The Professor drank in the symbolism of her posture greedily.' (p. 43)

However, Harish later realises that Virmati is literally myopic and not quite drunk in love as he had imagined. The metaphor of Virmati being myopic can be extended beyond its literal meaning of nearsightedness. Here, it is likely used as a symbolic representation of her limited vision or perspective, both in terms of her personal choices and the societal expectations placed upon her. Virmati's myopic perspective might symbolize her inability to foresee the long-term consequences of her choices. Her involvement with Harish, a married man, and the societal repercussions of such a relationship may not have been fully anticipated. Overwhelmed by domestic responsibilities and a deep yearning for maternal affection, Virmati finds solace in the charms of a captivating individual. However, this refuge proves illusory as the object of her affection is incapable of reciprocating the love she desperately seeks.

'Mati told her it will be a boy, and this is what every man wants, even if he is educated.' (p.96)

In her communication with Harish, Virmati's distress intensifies upon learning of Harish's impending fatherhood, exacerbating her profound sense of being unloved. The news accentuates the emotional void she experiences, underscoring the complexities of her unconventional relationship and the unfulfilled yearning for the affection she so deeply craves.

'Ganga rejoiced. He was sending her away. True, she was going to study, and was not being returned to her mother's, which would have been a clearer statement, but still, the house would be all hers.' (p. 228)

The patriarchal dynamics at play within the narrative create a divisive environment, pitting Ganga and Virmati against each other, despite the core issue lying with Harish's indecision. While Harish struggles with making a choice, it is the women who bear the brunt of societal expectations and judgments. The oppressive influence of patriarchy forces Ganga and Virmati into a perceived competition, emphasizing the unequal burden placed on women when men falter.

In Elaine Showalter's three-phase model of feminist literary criticism, Virmati, her mother Kasturi, and her daughter Ida can be seen as embodying different aspects of women's roles and experiences.

Virmati, by challenging traditional gender roles, pursuing education, and engaging in unconventional relationships, represents the feminist phase. Her character embodies the struggle against societal norms that restrict women's autonomy and aspirations. Virmati's actions and choices reflect a desire for independence and self-determination, aligning with the themes of feminist literature.

Kasturi, Virmati's mother, on the other hand, may symbolize the feminine phase in Showalter's model. Her character may conform more closely to traditional gender roles and societal expectations. The feminine phase often involves an exploration of women's experiences within existing frameworks, which could be reflected in Virmati's mother's adherence to established norms.

Ida, as Virmati's daughter, represents the female phase in Showalter's model. This phase involves celebrating and exploring the unique experiences of women without necessarily challenging or conforming to established norms. Ida's character might embody a new generation's perspective, influenced by both the feminist struggles of Virmati and the more traditional experiences of her grandmother, as seen in these lines by Ida:

'This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be. Do not haunt me anymore.' (p. 258)

Virmati's pursuit of education, while a bold departure from traditional gender roles, falls short of providing the life she desires due to lingering societal expectations. Despite her educational achievements, her mother's ingrained perspective influences Virmati's belief that she needs a man to fulfill her life, leading her to poor choices. This perceived dependency on men is later criticized by her daughter, Ida, who perceives Virmati's passivity and overbearing nature in her later years as a hindrance to true empowerment and independence. The generational critique highlights the ongoing struggle against ingrained societal norms and the complex interplay of individual choices within a broader cultural context.

Virmati's profound need for love is intricately tied to her quest for identity, yet her longing for a conventional marriage ultimately proves to be her downfall. Unlike her cousin Shakuntala, who successfully defies societal expectations by chasing her academic dreams with aplomb, Virmati emerges with shattered wings, the pursuit of a traditional union overshadowing her individuality. Virmati's consistent tendency to settle for less in various aspects of her life stems from a deep-seated yearning for maternal affection that remains unfulfilled.

The absence of nurturing love from her mother compels Virmati to accept compromises, whether in relationships or personal pursuits, as she seeks a semblance of the emotional connection she has longed for. This pattern of settling reflects the profound impact of maternal influence on shaping Virmati's choices and highlights the enduring emotional void that drives her decisions throughout her journey.

AMMU AND RAHEL

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy tells the story of twins Rahel and Estha in Kerala, India. Their lives are shaped by family secrets, societal rules, and forbidden love, leading to tragedy. Roy delves into themes of caste, politics, and tradition, crafting a powerful tale about human connections and the influence of society.

'When they left the police station Ammu was crying, so Estha and Rahel didn't ask her what veshya meant. Or for that matter, illegitimate.' (*The God of Small Things,* p. 8)

This passage from Arundhati Roy's *The God Of Small Things* offers an initial glimpse into Ammu's character, portraying her as someone who seldom cried and was resolute in shielding her children from harsh truths. Indeed, despite Ammu's innate desire to be a loving mother to Rahel, the challenging circumstances of her life made it difficult to fulfill that role completely.

'When she looked at herself in her wedding photographs, Ammu felt the woman that looked back at her was someone else. A foolish jewelled bride.' (p. 43)

Seeing Rahel and Estha's willingness to love without reservation may have stirred up painful memories for Ammu. It likely reminded her of her own youthful naivety, when she believed in the transformative power of love despite warning signs and red flags. This realization may have filled her with a sense of regret and a desire to spare her children from the same heartache and disappointment she experienced, leading her to poor choices.

Ammu, the mother of twins Rahel and Estha, is the sole daughter of Mammachi and Pappachi. Exhibiting a strong-willed and rebellious nature, she departs from her family's abode at the age of eighteen to wed Babu, whom she has known for merely five days. Her bid to break free from the constraints of her past is thwarted when she discovers Babu's alcoholism and his attempt to coerce her into compromising situations to salvage his job. In a display of her inner strength and independence, Ammu retaliates by physically confronting Babu before retreating to her hometown of Ayemenem, where she assumes the role of the town eccentric.

'You're not angry, Ammu. In a happy whisper. A little more her mother loved her.' (p. 329)

Midway through the narrative, it surfaces that Ammu suffered abuse at the hands of Pappachi during her childhood, a trauma that continues to haunt her and shape her emotional volatility. Her frustrations and fluctuating moods take a toll on the twins, particularly Rahel, who harbors deep-seated insecurities about her mother's love.

Furthermore, Ammu's return to Ayemenem, her family home, after her failed marriage only reinforces her feelings of being unloved and unwanted. Despite seeking refuge with her own family, she finds herself once again confronted with rejection and isolation. This sense of alienation fuels her determination to protect Rahel and Estha from similar experiences, even if it means making choices that society deems questionable or unconventional. It was only in the embrace of music that Ammu could momentarily reclaim her sense of identity and autonomy, finding solace in the ephemeral escape it provided from the constraints of her reality.

Despite facing similar challenges of divorce and personal indiscretions, Ammu's brother Chacko was entitled to more respect within the patriarchal structure of society. This discrepancy highlights the double standards and gender biases prevalent in their community. Despite Ammu's efforts to navigate her circumstances with resilience and dignity, she was often met with judgment and condemnation, while Chacko faced fewer repercussions for his actions. The unequal treatment Ammu experienced underscores the systemic inequalities and entrenched gender norms that favoured men over women, even within their own family.

'What was it that gave Ammu this Unsafe Edge? This air of unpredictability? It was what she had battling inside her. An unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber. It was this that grew inside her, and eventually led her to love by night the man her children loved

by day. To use by night the boat that her children used by day. The boat that Estha sat on, and Rahel found.' (p.44)

In her quest to shield her children from pain, Ammu may have inadvertently pushed them away or made decisions that have unintended consequences. Her own unresolved trauma and deep-seated insecurities create a barrier between herself and her children, preventing her from fully connecting with them on an emotional level. This emotional distance, coupled with her fear of rejection, shapes her parenting style and influences the choices she makes regarding Rahel and Estha.

'But when they made love, he was offended by her eyes. They behaved as though they belonged to someone else.' (p. 19)

Rahel feels the weight of this emotional separation, navigating existence with a profound sense of disconnection from her surroundings. As her husband Larry observes in the lines above, Rahel seems to drift through life with a palpable detachment, as though she exists on the outskirts of her own emotions, distanced from the vibrant pulse of the world around her.

It was, they whispered to each other, as though she didn't know how to be a girl.' (p. 17)

These lines were said about Rahel at her school, whispered when she gets caught for acts of misbehaviour. Rahel struggled to understand how to embody femininity because she lacked a role model in Ammu, who unintentionally neglected her while grappling with the adversities of her own life.

'*Little Ammu.*

Who never completed her corrections.

Who had to pack her bags and leave.' (p. 159)

Ammu's life is marked by a series of decisions to flee, first escaping her abusive household and later, her abusive husband.Ammu wants to escape from her situation, but it's not just her decision to leave that stops her. There are certain expectations and rules based on gender and caste in her society that make it difficult for her to break free. Even when she tries to find solace by being with Velutha, who is from a lower caste, she faces obstacles. These obstacles are mainly caused by Baby Kochamma, who is bitter about love and is determined to uphold traditional norms. Baby Kochamma is also driven by a desire for revenge against Velutha, whom she believes insulted her. So, Ammu's struggle to escape her circumstances is not only about her own choices but also about the rigid societal expectations and personal vendettas that stand in her way.

Despite her deep love for her children, her inclination to run away leads to traumatic circumstances that impact not just her, but also her children, especially Rahel. Rahel's life is shaped by her mother's choices, forced to live alongside her as they remain separated from her twin brother Estha, who is sent to live with their father.

Ammu's constant battle to assert herself and challenge patriarchal norms proves to be a futile struggle. Despite her efforts, she finds herself continually thwarted by societal expectations. Her love affair with Velutha, a man from a lower caste, ends disastrously, underscoring the insurmountable barriers imposed by caste and class divisions in Indian society.

VIRMATI VS AMMU

Both Ammu and Virmati navigate patriarchal societies that limit women's agency and autonomy. However, the specific social contexts they inhabit differ. Ammu's story is set in Kerala, India, in the late 1960s, where caste and class hierarchies intersect with gender norms. Virmati's narrative takes place in pre-partition and post-partition India, against the backdrop of political upheaval and societal transformation.

Both characters challenge societal expectations and traditional gender roles in their respective contexts. Ammu defies societal norms by engaging in a forbidden love affair with an untouchable, Velutha, which leads to her ostracization from her family and community. Virmati, on the other hand, pursues education and personal fulfillment despite societal pressures to conform to traditional roles for women.

Motherhood plays a significant role in both characters' lives but in different ways. Ammu is a single mother raising her twins, Rahel and Estha, in challenging circumstances, shaped by her defiance of societal norms and her desire to protect her children. Virmati, on the other hand, experiences motherhood within the confines of a traditional family structure. Her relationship with her daughter Ida reflects the generational conflicts and societal expectations of the time.

The trajectories of Ammu and Virmati's lives differ significantly. Ammu's defiance of societal norms leads to tragedy, as she and Velutha face violent consequences for their forbidden love. Virmati's story, while also marked by personal struggles and societal constraints, does not end in the same tragic manner. However, she still grapples with the consequences of her choices within the context of her family and society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Ammu and Virmati emerge as feminists in their own right, challenging societal norms and following their hearts in matters of love and education, respectively. However, their daughters end up as collateral damage, bearing irreparable wounds. Despite Ammu and Virmati's hopes for redemption through their daughters, they ultimately face disappointment. This underscores the complex interplay of individual agency and societal constraints, highlighting the enduring impact of patriarchal structures on women's lives and the generations that follow. While they assert their agency and challenge societal norms, their roles as both mothers and daughters remain unfulfilled, reflecting the enduring struggle of women to reconcile personal aspirations with societal expectations.

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