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# Mother – Daughter Relationships: A Study of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Difficult Daughters* and *Fasting, Feasting*

## M.Phil. Dissertation


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# Mother – Daughter Relationships: A Study of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Difficult Daughters* and *Fasting, Feasting*

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DECLARATION

This is to certify that the material embodied in the present work entitled "**Mother – Daughter Relationships: A Study of *The Dark Holds No Terrors, Difficult Daughters* and *Fasting, Feasting***" is based on my original research. It has not been submitted in part or full for any other diploma or degree of any university.

My indebtedness to other works has been duly acknowledged at relevant places.

Countersigned by Supervisor Signature of the Candidate

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**Dedicated**

**To**

**My Mother**

**The Source of Incessant Love**

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# Chapter – 1

# INTRODUCTION

It is said that life is all about relationships. Human beings are the products of the social system in which they live and dwell, and in order to play their societal roles appropriately, certain types of relationships have been established. The one thing that these relationships give birth to is a sense of commitment. One of the most committed relationships, from emotional and psychological point of view, is the one shared by mother and daughter. However, in today's postmodern world, in which gay-lesbian relationships and live-in relationships are the burning issues of discussion, it appears a little obsolete to talk about mother-daughter relationship. But one cannot gainsay the fact that this is undoubtedly the single relationship that has the strongest bearing on a woman's life and experience.

Themes of segregation and women's subjugation under patriarchy begin to reverberate in Indian English Fiction after independence. A woman's social identity, then, came to be examined with reference to her two major roles – wife and mother. In Indian English fiction, this theme has been represented recently, though with remarkable variations, in the works of a group of women writers including Anita Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Shobha De, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Bharati Mukherjee, and others. The male writers, however, never diverted from the stereotypical image of motherhood; whereas these women writers have done their best to emancipate women from the protective mother stereotype. The pioneer in the analysis of different ways in which women are affected by motherhood is Anita Desai. The rejection of motherhood follows an entirely unique pattern in her novels like *Voices in the City*, *Cry the Peacock* and *Fasting, Feasting,* where the image of nurturing motherhood is reversed. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels deliver the perspectives on motherhood of a woman, whose upbringing has been traditional. The novels of Shobha De represent the view of women who tend to prefer their individuality over motherhood. Shashi Deshpande's portrayals are interwoven with the poetics of loss. They transgress the boundaries of conventional motherhood. Her protagonists are aware of the fact that rearing the child saps the mother's entire energy and destroys the myth of an all-

absorbing, all-sacrificing motherhood. Arundhati Roy's novels are generally based on the idea that motherhood or loss of it has tremendous impact on women; it has the capacity to break a woman's morale completely and she is entirely powerless to safeguard herself both emotionally and physically. Manju Kapur's fiction focuses on the obligations of mother and how it affects her own life and experience along with that of her daughter. Last but not the least, Bharati Mukherjee's writings dwell on the image of motherhood and show what obligatory motherhood is. She believes that it is devotion and unwavering obligation that is demanded from the mother. However, from this huge corpus of writings Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* and Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* have been selected for critical scrutiny to probe the different and complex dimensions of mother-daughter relationships. This selection has been done with due consideration to the fact that these texts range from 1980s to 2000, covering the most formative years of Indian English Fiction. One more important reason is that these three novels can be regarded as the pinnacle of these writers' career, leading their life of writing towards self-definition. Experienced as both mothers and daughters, these writers tend to redefine the mother-daughter bonds through their present novels. Their representation of mothers and daughters is of abiding interest. Moreover, these texts demonstrate the changes and transformations that have occurred in mother-daughter ties with the passage of time and also how much feminist movement in India has been successful in changing the mindset of women at least about themselves.

Gifted with a rare literary bent of mind, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed, in her fiction, the inner turmoil of a woman, fighting within herself, between her own knowledge and surroundings. The novels of Deshpande, however, are an example of the ways in which a girl child's particular position, social reality and psychological growth determine her personality. The role of early life experiences, the role of education, closeness to parents, sibling relationships are some of the very crucial elements that go a long way in creating a woman's personality. Deshpande is primarily concerned with women's quest for self-exploration into female psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonists' place in it. What is so peculiar about Deshpande is that women in her novels seek to establish themselves as independent beings free from the restrictions imposed by society, culture, nature and also from their own fears and guilt. The important insight that Deshpande brings

to her readers is that women should accept their own responsibility for what they are and see how much they have contributed to their own victimization. However, as far as critical material on Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is concerned, it is available mainly in the form of articles and research papers scattered through various anthologies and research journals.

Though Shashi Deshpande has dismissed the label of feminist writer for herself, yet her novels speak for the female-folk and plead for their betterment. Hence, scholars and critics principally consider her novels as being feminist texts. When Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* came in 1980, much energy was invested to probe the feminist issues, either knowingly or unknowingly, incorporated in it. Women's miserable situation and secondary place in society resulting in their subjugation has been studied by such critics as Shubha Tiwari, Charu Chandra Mishra and Siddhartha Sharma. Tiwari's essay essentially focuses on the plight of the protagonist as being an unwanted child and thus "growing hatred, hostility and lovelessness within her" (85). Mishra's essay deals with the feminist movement in general and husband-wife relationship in particular. On the other hand, Sharma, in his study, touches one feminist issue after another and thus provides an overall analysis of the novel. He aptly concludes his study saying that "Shashi Deshpande does not let herself get overwhelmed by the Western feminism or its militant concept of emancipation. In quest for the wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one's identity within marriage" (37). But these critics who touch the feminist issues in her novel, have confined their critical lens merely to study women as a wife or woman, neglecting thereby her two crucial roles – mother and daughter.

In Deshpande's novels her treatment of the theme is equally significant as her treatment of her characters. So, thematic studies have been carried out by critics like Premila Paul and Aparna Sundaram. Paul finds the theme of confrontation as capturing the essence of the novel. She opines that the novel confronts, "the myth of man's unquestionable superiority and the myth of woman being a martyr and a paragon of all virtues" (30). But Paul's discussion on the theme of confrontation does not include how woman as daughter confronts the superior and authoritative position of woman as mother in their mutual relationship. Rather her focus is confined merely to explain how the theme of confrontation works in

male-female bonds. On the other hand, Sundaram, in her comparative study of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Anita Nair's *Mistress*, dwells upon the theme of marriage, sexual violence and Indian masculinity. Her essay focuses "on the act of marital rape as a tool used by men to reaffirm their 'superior position' in a marriage" (19). Sundaram comments, "Creation of any identity – masculine or feminine – rests mainly upon the patterns of power structures that exist in a society" (20). But she does not discuss how patriarchy perpetuates these patterns of power and through whom. It is the mother who has been assigned the task of socializing the daughter in these power structures. But Sundaram nowhere focuses on this crucial facet of patriarchal society.

Critics like Nalinabh Tripathi and Beena Agarwal have used their critical insight to probe the issues of gender-discrimination and identity formation. Tripathi argues that *The Dark Holds No Terrors* "projects deconstruction as well as reconstruction of gender roles" (43). His essay also points out how women are used to recreate the gender-differences within the patriarchal society. But Tripathi does not pay any heed to probe why mother is used to recreate gender-differences. His study lacks the psychological significance of the role of mother in daughter's life. Beena Agarwal in her study of Shashi Deshpande's fictional world encapsulates, "Shashi Deshpande in the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* moves with the vision of the spaces of alternate identities from parental home to the home of husband from marital periphery to extra-marital periphery to scan the phenomenon that gender prejudices are not inherent in the biological difference . . ." (42). Agarwal speculates on the fate of the middle class Indian woman, as depicted in the novel, who accepts professional independence to carve out spaces for alternate identity. But still Agarwal's study lacks a comprehensive discussion of what kind of role is played by mother in the formation of daughter's separate identity. She merely focuses on the daughter's trials and tribulations, ignoring mother's influence on her daughter's life.

A few critics like Mrinalini Sebastian have also interpreted *The Dark Holds No Terrors* as a postcolonial text. Sebastian finds a sense of revolt and protest as projected in the novel especially through the protagonist's "subversive manner" (171). She argues that it is only by being aware of the different kinds of women that we could talk about the postcolonial woman. She takes up the issue of Saru's domestic servant Janakibai into consideration to

probe the lasting presence of colonialism. Sebastian comments, "She [Janakibai] is the representative of all the women who belong to this section of the working women category who has no job security whatsoever. Once again, the women at the margins of the narration are the women who make this narration possible by allowing the protagonist to leave the smooth running of her own small family to them" (175). Her study, though a noble attempt, does not fully touch the essence of postcolonial argument as it lacks the point how a daughter struggles to decolonize herself from the domination of her mother.

There are critics like Arindam Chatterji who critically analyse *The Dark Holds No Terrors* from a psychological point of view. But the basic limitation of Chatterji's essay is that it applies the premises of D. W. Winnicott's psychoanalytic theory solely, without comparing or contrasting with any other psychoanalytic critic. But despite this drawback, Chatterji's essay gives some enlightening insights about the psychological effects caused by the mother in her daughter's personality. Chatterji observes that "In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita goes back to her primitive environment to try and locate the self that she had lost years ago to a mother who had monstrously impinged on her tender mind with the myriad distortions of a patriarchal order that she herself had imbibed from her own damaged childhood" (97). But still his study is a limited attempt in that he has not explored how the psychologically affected daughter responds to her mother's domination.

The mother and daughter relationships have been probed by scholars like Rashmi Sahi and Rashmi Gaur. Sahi's approach to this relationship is comparatively limited because she treats it with a general outlook. She points out, "She [Deshpande] has not valourized the image of mother as goddess, instead she has rendered more human qualities to her" (19). Sahi's line of argument is based on the mother's influence on the daughter's personality and the role of gender-bias in the socialization of the daughter. "In Shashi Deshpande's novel mother and mother figures are not the matriarchs to be glorified but the suffocative and authoritative figures to be disdained" (Sahi 20). Sahi merely gives an overview of the mother figures without analyzing their relationships with daughters at the psychological level. It gives the impression that her paper is a mere sociological study of this relationship and not a psychological one. On the other hand, Rashmi Gaur's essay is quite enlightening, exposing various complex dimensions of mother-daughter conflicts. Mother herself contributes to the

germination of a complex in the girl child by attaching more value and importance to the son. As a result, the daughter develops a sense of revolt against the mother and begins to consider her the biggest opponent. Gaur points out, "The shadows of her unhappy relationship with her mother darken her adolescence, her early youth and even her first love" (95). Later on, along with mother-daughter relationship, Gaur also discusses the man-woman relationship and thus somewhat loses the focus. Though she considers parental love and especially mother's emotional support as indispensable for a daughter's happy life, but she also tends to show the need of turning inward to their own self, instead of their mothers, to be their own strength and support. According to her, "the fear of losing oneself in the dark labyrinthine passages of this mysterious world is dispelled, if a woman understands that she will have no refuge in any relationship unless she believes in her own self and accepts the responsibilities of her own life" (102).

Like *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, by Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur's debut novel, *Difficult Daughters*, too has been subjected to multiple interpretations. However a vast range of critical acumen has been invested on the feminist issues incorporated in her other novels also. But, as far as the critical material on *Difficult Daughters* is concerned, a number of trends immediately become perceptible to the reader.

Critics primarily interpret Kapur's present novel as a feminist text. Christopher Rollason comments that Manju Kapur speaks primarily, with great narrative eloquence, of the idea of independence. Rollason further argues that "the pages of *Difficult Daughters* speak not only of Virmati, but of other 'difficult daughters', who succeed better than she did in their parallel struggles for independence in their lives" (3). What happens to Virmati is no doubt the most representative destiny of the Indian woman (even if educated), but Kapur's novel shows that other paths also exist, while further stressing that other choices are by no means simple or either-or. Certain other critics like Shilpi Rishi Srivastava, Sangeeta Mehta and Ruby Milhoutra focus, however, on the emergence of 'New Woman' and her search for identity and autonomy in Kapur's novel, *Difficult Daughters*. According to Srivastava, "Virmati symbolizes the changed mindset of Indian girls who want to decide their future and refuse to be treated like things. And her gathering voice symbolizes the freedom the females run after" (21). Whereas Mehta argues that the idea of independence can be made true by only one

thing that is woman empowerment. She firmly states, "Woman has to be given economic independence, for freedom without economic freedom is meaningless" (126). According to Milhoutra, Manju Kapur has very well combined the story of India's partition and the family partition. The novelist, through the character portrayal of Virmati, Harish, Ida and Kasturi wants to convey that loyalties, identities and nations were becoming a matter of choice rather than tradition. She points out, "The title of the novel *Difficult Daughters* is an indicator to the message that a woman, who tries to search an identity, is branded as a difficult daughter by the family and the society as well" (163). These critics have talked much about the need of identity and autonomy on the daughter's part. However, Kapur speaks for the independence of both mothers and daughters in her novel. The idea of independence is equally related to mothers as it is to daughters. But these critics concentrate merely on daughter's struggle to independence, ignoring mother's aspirations and efforts, as well as her own restrictive and shaping circumstances.

A few scholars like Shaleen Kumar Singh find out that the clash of tradition and modernity is at the centre of the novel. Singh argues that Manju Kapur has successfully portrayed the conflict of tradition and modernity in her characters. The specialty is that her female characters are not only involved in clash against male-dominated traditional world but they also suffer this conflict in the form of generation gap. He points out, "The continuity of clash between tradition and modernity in the women of three generations from Kasturi to Ida ends both in admittance and rejection" (13). Another significant point which Singh raises is that "female characters of Manju Kapur are more influenced with the thought of modernity contrary to men who have been still the same ailed with male-chauvinism, averse to all progressive ideas and indifferent to any type of such clash" (13). Although, the conflict of tradition and modernity has been comprehensively explored by Singh, but it does not focus on the conflict generated by the traditionality of the mother and the modernity of the daughter.

There is another group of critics like Binod Mishra and Reena Mitra who attempt to analyse the novel from a humanitarian standpoint. Mishra tries to evaluate Virmati's trials and tribulations she is destined to. He has diligently tried to defend Virmati, not under any prejudice but on the plea that when everyone opposes her and puts restrictions she is bound to

evoke sympathy on the ground of an individual's right to expression and freedom of choice. In Mishra's views, "Virmati is the representative of those who try to break the taboos and yet fail to prove their sparks because of their loyalties, which often criss-cross in their cases" (190). On the other hand, Reena Mitra concentrates on the bonding that family and society represent which provides a sense of psychological security. She finds out that relationship born of social sanction and social constraints is the primary concern of Manju Kapur's novel, *Difficult Daughters*. Her area of focus is the social and psychological freedom. She points out, "women at a relatively advanced stage of life, laboring under the various compulsions, enjoy less social and psychological freedom than men and are forced to live their lives in the shadow, first, of parental dominance, and then, of patriarchal oppression" (73). But this group of critics does not take into consideration the idea of matriarchal domination. A girl in patriarchal society is doubly burdened, first by the parents and then by the society per se. After her marriage, the dominance of father is replaced by the husband. But she can never get rid of her mother's influence due to some peculiarity of the bond which they mutually share. This significant aspect remains untouched in their humanitarian study of the novel.

Critics like Indira Bhatt explore the issue of marriage in Manju Kapur's novel, *Difficult Daughters.* Bhatt points out that Kapur in her present novel has presented a woman who considers marriage as the ultimate end of life's journey. In her view, Virmati is convinced of the other possibilities "something other than a wife" (125). Her essay also focuses on the hollowness that becomes visible after getting married. What Bhatt finds is that "Kapur has not effectively perceived the realities of the protagonist's existence from the inside, her dependence, her own created captivity. Once married Virmati dissolves like a salt doll" (130). Bhatt has not discussed that it is actually her mother's excessive concern for her daughter's marriage that unconsciously forces Virmati to consider finally marriage as her life's destiny.

Manju Kapur has also been analyzed as a post-colonial writer by such critics as Sunita Sinha and O. P. Dwivedi. Sinha considers Manju Kapur among the writers who have portrayed the 'new woman' who is inclined to take the 'road not taken,' and walking on their 'own road.' In her opinion, "Manju Kapur is one Indian writer who prefers reality to magic realism and recreates an intimate world" (160). The central idea in Sinha's essay is the parallel which she draws between the three generations of women and the three stages of

Indian independence. Whereas O. P. Dwivedi contemplates on the notion of 'double colonization' of women wherein they are colonized both by patriarchal and imperial ideologies. Dwivedi considers Virmati "a prototype of postcolonial Indian woman because she succeeds to shake off the fetters of her mother's influence over her" (32). However, these critics do not consider how the colonization of the mother in the society leads to the colonization of the daughter at her mother's hands.

The theme of motherhood or mother-daughter relationship is brought home by scholars such as Asha Choubey and Jaydeep Rishi. Choubey grounds her argument on the point that mother-daughter bond, which was accustomed to be highly romanticized, has come to be portrayed in more realistic light in *Difficult Daughters*. She further observes that Virmati's mother, instead of protecting the interests of her daughter, becomes instrumental in torturing her. Choubey simply blames Kasturi for being a hindrance in the over-all growth of her daughter. She talks about Kasturi's maternal alienation and states: "The sense of belonging that is the essence of a good relationship is found sadly missing from this relationship which is most vital in the life of a woman" (114). The basic limitation of Choubey's study is that it focuses more on the general nature of this relationship rather than on Virmati and her relation with her mother in particular. However, Jaydeep Rishi has something more to say about this relationship. His line of argument is that "Women experience a superior position only in their relationship with children, especially with their daughters. Once the daughter grows up and disturbs the power equation, the mother loses her privileged position" (92). Rishi also talks about the centre/periphery and positive/negative dualism, and articulates that Ida not only questions these dichotomies but reconstructs the story of her mother's life through her imagination. "In her imaginative reconstruction Ida frees her mother from the bounds of periphery and in doing so asserts her own centrality as a creator. By becoming Virmati's creator, Ida frees herself from the dominance of her mother" (94). However Jaydeep Rishi, at one place in his essay, mentions that in some cases the mother and daughter finally reach a natural and better understanding of each other's compulsions and predicaments. But he does not try to further explore this dimension of mother-daughter ties.

Anita Desai is one of the most thought provoking creative novelists in the realm of Indian fiction in English. She has added a new and significant dimension to Indian English fiction

and to the portrayal of the sufferings of women. The thing which distinguishes Anita Desai from other novelists writing in English is her preoccupation with the study of the inner world of the individual, particularly the undeserved miseries and untold sufferings of the women who are ruthlessly persecuted and rendered vulnerable, alienated and helpless. Her novel *Fasting, Feasting*, which was published in 1999, greatly fascinated scholars and critics, and has been interpreted and analyzed from different parameters. The existing criticism on *Fasting, Feasting* is available only in the form of research articles included in different anthologies and journals.

First and foremost, the novel has been interpreted as a feminist piece, voicing the agony and oppression caused to the women-folk. Critics like Asha Choubey and Pamela Oliver have made a profound attempt to expose the implicit injustice and subjugation of women. Choubey is of the view that "it's not only male-chauvinism that has caused havoc but also female-reluctance to face the challenges and even female-apathy that is responsible for this disparity" (Frailty 123). Choubey argues that Desai brings into focus parental apathy which scars the daughters permanently. She makes a powerful observation that "Desai as a true humanist puts the blame not only on men who are suffering with the complex of male-superiority but also on women who oppress their own kind" (126). The prime focus of her essay is that feminists all over blame not only "male-possessiveness and chauvinism" but also "female reluctance, easy acquiescence and lethargy" (130) for the present miserable condition of women. On the other hand, Pamela Oliver talks about the role of family in perpetuating the values of the patriarchal society and the ways through which it can spoil the lives of its members. In her view, "*Fasting, Feasting* cuts right to the heart of family life in two different cultures" (247). She vividly presents the movements where family pathetically suppresses the individuality of its members, especially of women. These critics do not probe the issue as to how the male superiority is instilled in the daughter's mind at a tender age by the mother herself. It becomes difficult to identify who is the victim and who the survivor?

The issue of gender-discrimination is found at the centre of the novel, *Fasting, Feasting*. This dimension has been probed by critics like Amar Nath Prasad and Usha Rani. Prasad has developed his line of argument on the postulation that there are some characters who are feasting with joy, but the book also has some characters whose lives are meant for fasting

only and that too both physically and spiritually. He encapsulates, "Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* shows, apart from many other things, how women have to lead a life of suffocation and undeserved sufferings – both physical and mental in a male dominated patriarchal framework" (37); whereas, Usha Rani's essay focuses chiefly on the gender-based attitude of the parents. She firmly states, "The reader wonders, how it could be that the same parents who are much worried and anxious about their son's higher education, foreign degrees, could be so cruel to their first child and deny her even the little joys of life" (176). These critics have, however, comprehensively discussed how gender discrimination works negatively in the patriarchal society as it greatly affects the personality of the individual and how parents themselves discriminate between their sons and daughters. But these critics have not tried to probe how gender-discrimination works in female-female relationships; that is, how members of the same gender discriminate among themselves.

A considerable amount of energy has also been invested to bring out a thematic study of *Fasting, Feasting*. Critics like T. Ravichandaran consider entrapment as the central theme of the novel. Ravichandaran observes that "Reduced to a baby-sitter at her earlier days and an unpaid servant for her self-centred parents for the rest of her life, Uma finds no escape from her entrapment" (83). But his study is not confined merely to the analysis of entrapment of women characters; rather he examines how male characters are also ensnared. Ravichandaran holds the view, "And ironic enough, it is education which, instead of offering the desired autonomy, paves way for Arun's entrapment" (86). He also tends to search reasons lying behind these entrapments and then dismisses them one by one. But he nowhere takes up the issue of a daughter's entrapment at the hands of the mother.

Anita Desai has carved out a significant niche in Indian English fiction by centralizing in her fiction the mental agonies, the internal strife and trauma faced by the women protagonists with a difference. Thus, the psychological aspects of the novel have been critically examined by critics such as Meenakshi Raman and Sushila Rathore. Both these critics, in their combined study, analyse the internal anguish faced by Uma, the central character, with aplomb. They hold the view, "Her innermost self is smothered as a result of the open biasness shown by her parents after the birth of a son" (134). Their essay primarily focuses on the apathetic and rude behaviour of Uma's parents that has never allowed her to become a mature

person. They are responsible in making her a diffident child having no inclination towards creating a separate existence. But these critics do not strive to find out what has raised conflict between Uma and her mother and thus made their relation strained. The psychological dimensions of mother-daughter relationship have been completely ignored by them.

Critics and scholars have also acknowledged the stylistics and technical features of *Fasting, Feasting*. M. Q. Khan points out that *Fasting, Feasting* marks a departure from all of Desai's earlier major works. He observes that "Apart from the clarity of language, it is the device of contrast of time, situation and characters that adds to the structural organization of the novel" (102). Khan also highlights that the use of similitude discloses Desai's utter simplicity of diction; it shows her "sense of preciseness, exactitude and accuracy" (102). He further observes that one may notice, while reading, her marvellous use of the syntax, the balancing of phrases and the force of narrative texture. However, he does not limit his study merely to technical features of the novel. Instead, he also remarks that "Her novels are not meant to explain the theories of philosophy and psychology; on the other hand, they reveal her involvement in the deep feelings of her women who are seen as the worst sufferers, highly suppressed by social 'tantalization' or marital discord" (105). But Khan does not notice the very expressions of Desai through which she unravels the latent conflict between Uma and her mother.

The studies about relationships have also been conducted by critics, and it is the mother-daughter relationship which is found at the centre of this novel. Critics like Asha Choubey and Aparna Goswami and Bhaskar Jyoti Goswami have used their pen to expose the latent reality of the tender bond that mother and daughter share. Choubey, in her study, quite strongly affirms, "Daughters are not all that dependent, admiring lot and mothers are not all that doting, sacrificing one. Their relationship is shaped by the circumstances that dominate" (Mothers 106). Her essay focuses on the apathy, indifference and alienation of Uma's mother which prove to be a great hindrance in the overall growth of her daughter, Uma. She holds the view, "Parental apathy – more precisely maternal indifference – destroys a life full of possibility" (Mothers 117). However, Aparna Goswami and Bhaskar Jyoti Goswami, in their combined study, employ a psychological insight to investigate the internal conflicts of

mother-daughter bonds. They chiefly assert, "The process of a woman's attaining the status of a mother is not merely biological but a socio-psychological one . . . and overshadows all the other aspects of the concerned woman's individuality" (191). They point out that sociological research in India has attributed larger than life status to motherhood. These critics proclaim the mothers of Anita Desai's novels as self-centred who use their children as agents to fulfil their aims and aspirations, which they themselves could not attain. But these critics concentrate more on the general nature of mother-daughter relationships than on the psychological dimensions of the conflict existing between Uma and her mother.

Thus a brief critical appraisal of the existing criticism on *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Difficult Daughters* and *Fasting, Feasting* reveals that despite considerable critical acumen there is a dearth of studies about mother-daughter relationships. But it is also the fact that these novelists have not been accorded acknowledgement that they deserve for exposing the hidden recesses of mother-daughter bonds. It is quite surprising that only a few articles and research papers have been written on these novels which deal with mother-daughter ties, presenting only a lopsided view of their creative output. What is more surprising is that none of the critics has made a comprehensive and detailed analysis of various complex dimensions of mother-daughter relations presented in these novels. We just find a passing reference to the conflicts existing between mothers and daughters in these scanty articles. However, it does not mean that the vision of these novelists of mother-daughter predicament has not been recognized and acknowledged. There are a few critics who have done commendable studies focusing on some of the important aspects of mother-daughter bonds. But their little corpus of criticism is limited to a few issues related to this conflicting relation. There are numerous facets of mother-daughter relationships that remain yet to be explored fully. Therefore it would be interesting to discover the complex dynamics of mother-daughter ties in the Indian traditional patriarchal milieu. Most of the studies either completely ignore or give merely a cursory glance at the role and status of mothers and daughters, portrayed sensitively and realistically in these three novels. It clearly manifests that the available criticism on the present novels suffers from imbalances as well as distortions in evaluating the lot of mothers and daughters in the Indian society. A detailed study of these novels in question in the context of the travails and tribulations, victimization and exploitation of women as mothers and daughters in a male dominated society can do some justice to these writers' art and

vision. The present study seeks to make a humble attempt to fill the gaps in the existing criticism on mother-daughter bond though it does not pretend to say the final word on the topic. For the purpose of the study only the major works of these renowned novelists which have a direct reference to the topic have been taken up for an in-depth critical examination.

The attachment between mother and daughter is characterized by tenderness, love and affection. It is generally conceived as the most sacred bond replete with care and concern. The same kind of representation is found in the literature as well of the earlier times, since literature is a mirror to the society in which it is written and received. Swami Vivekananda has eulogized motherhood in these words:

> The ideal of womanhood in India is motherhood that marvelous, all suffering, unselfish, even forgiving mother. The wife walks behind the shadow, she must imitate the life of the mother; that is her duty. But the mother is the ideal of life, she rules the family, she possesses the family. (58)

Thus motherhood has been glorified and celebrated since times immemorial. Even the Gandhian movement in India, which had the objective of emancipating women, projected mother as a self-effacing, sacrificing person. But with the dissemination of awareness, especially in the later years of twentieth century, it is realized that such sacrificing image ties women to the role of a mother and she herself is expected to forget her individuality and view herself as a mother. The fact that the mother is an ordinary human being with her own passions and emotions is miserably ignored in the patriarchal society. It is only the role of mother that defines a woman's life and her social identity. K.R. Sujatha and S. Gokilavani hold the view, "The nature of motherhood is dependent on the cultures and societies that have molded them. Indian motherhood is inculcated in the woman from the day of her birth. She is raised to look forward to nothing else and she rates her worth by her efficiency to fulfil this role" (147). The rearing responsibility makes mothers the most influential in a child's mind. It is the greatest and inexorable influence for good or evil in human life. A young child's mind is the unwritten page that is stamped with the mother's image. She becomes the first realization of affection, sympathy and tenderness. Naturally, children are influenced by culture, class, country and, most definitely, by their mothers. The values and attitudes that they carry throughout their lives are influenced by the mother's relationship and guidance.

However, with the advent of psychoanalytic theories, the previously held assumptions about mother and her relationship with the child have given rise to a large body of critical discussions. Following the insights of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan has presented three stages of a child's development: imaginary-stage, mirror-stage and symbolic-stage. In this regard Pramod K. Nayar observes:

> Lacan argues that the child's notion and sense of the self emerges in its reference to an Other. Before the emergence of the self, the child lives in the realm of the *imaginary*. Here there is no distinction between the I and the Other. . . . In the pre-Oedipal stage the child has a *symbiotic* relationship with the mother, and does not distinguish between the mother's body and itself. (74)

Hence, it is in the imaginary-stage that the child finds itself in a one to one relationship with the mother where complete identification takes place. But when the child enters the mirror-stage, it begins to conceive a separate self of itself, different from that of the mother. "The 'mirror stage' is the origin of a fundamental alienation in the child's sense of the self" (Nayar 74), and finally, in the symbolic-stage, the child asserts its own identity represented by the language system. "The child discovers that it is separate from the mother, and is a part of a whole network – of family and society – in which it is expected and pre-ordained to play a specific part. It discovers that identity is based on difference – its difference from others" (Nayar 75). These doctrines of psychoanalytic critics greatly influenced the feminist studies in recent times. The feminist critics probe this relationship of mother and child minutely and often with different parameters. The male child, son, after reaching a certain stage, identifies himself more with the father than with the mother, and takes a leap into his own self. But, in case of daughter, she turns to the mother for strength, identity and understanding. In this context K.R. Sujatha and S. Gokilavani observe:

> Children become the 'sole justification' for a woman's existence and motherhood the 'biological destiny'. These ideas are inextricably strung into the consciousness of a female child to accept the role of a child-bearer for the husband. She is educated with skills and knowledge that are essential for maternal activities and home making skills.

There is one more significant face of this relationship. Mother knows quite strongly, from first-hand experience, what it is to be a daughter in a patriarchal society. So she adopts mostly, if not always, a mask to socialize the daughter, so that she can be protected from the fate which the mother had to meet once. This mask is the mask of motherhood. There is a considerable difference between being a mother and between practising motherhood. This disparity is the result of two key factors: to be a mother is a natural phenomenon endowed to women by Nature, but the concept of motherhood is a product of patriarchal society produced and perpetuated by men for centuries. Motherhood is a collection of defined characteristics and principles dictated by society to women. "Motherhood is one of the cultural impositions that deny women personhood. . . . Motherhood itself erases both sexuality and selfhood" (Jain and Kumar 122). Just because she gives birth and lactates, the entire responsibility for rearing and caring of the child falls upon her. Otherwise, there is no other natural or innate reason why only a woman should do mothering. The father takes a leap into the public sphere, leaving the entire responsibility of the child onto the mother's part.

Mother-daughter relationship is not a static but a dynamic one which passes through certain significant stages. What is interesting about it is that its impact can be felt on both of them, since every mother was once herself a daughter and every daughter would one day, possibly, attain motherhood. In this way, the experiences of the mother shape the life of the daughter, and the life of the daughter, in turn, transforms the experiences of the mother. Feminist psychoanalytic theorists suggest, "The sex-role socialization process is different for boys and girls. While boys learn maleness by rejecting femaleness via separating themselves from their mothers, girls establish feminine identities by embracing the femaleness of their mothers. Girls identify with their mothers, a sense of connection that is incorporated into the female personality" (Collins 52). Thus they are mutually related to each other. The only essential difference between them is that one is the original, experienced and fully realized self and the other is merely the mirror image of that self which keeps on struggling for the attainment of its originality.

In the patriarchal society, a woman has to suffer not only for belonging to the weaker sex but for being a daughter, being a wife and being a mother as well. These three roles constitute mostly, if not entirely, the feminine self of a woman. But if the daughter who is cursed even

in her childhood does not become a wife, it intensifies her sufferings. And even though after becoming a wife, if she cannot become a mother, she is looked down upon even by the members of her own sex. But what makes it more painful is that if the mother gives birth to a daughter, she has to face unbearable humiliation. Thus, the mother's suffering which started with being a daughter herself goes on and comes at its terrible climax by procreating her double. Therefore, woman's these two roles – daughter and mother – are inextricably attached to each other. But this mother-daughter relationship is not as simple as it seems initially; it becomes complicated between the daughter's childhood and adulthood.

The mother-daughter bond humming with love and affection has many diversified faces to show in today's scenario. The mother shares her own experiences and understanding with her daughter because she sees herself in her; and thus becomes extra protective. She feels herself important, strong and responsible in her relationship with the daughter. Alladi Uma comments:

> We cannot deal with the daughter's role and position in the family – whether it be Afro-American or Indian – without dealing with her relationship with her mother. The mother helps the daughter to define herself. She passes on the values of the community she considers worthwhile. The daughter may accept, question or reject them. (76)

Moreover, a mother who is not recognized as equal by her man and who remains powerless, silent and repressed in her marital home tends to seek recognition in her relationship with her children, especially with daughter. She exercises power, control and restrictions on her daughter and thus gains a sense of authority and derives confirmation that she too exists. But exposed to the education in her adolescence, the daughter struggles to attain her individuality, by rejecting the womanliness of her mother. Her mother's mannerism, value system, life style, and everything belonging to her seem to the daughter a clumsy world of dependence and regression. Hence, the daughter sometimes reacts against and sometimes rejects her mother's overwhelming authority. Such behaviour of the daughter generates a feeling of guilt or failure in the psyche of the mother. "The more I get frustrated, the more she's [daughter] losing interest . . . I really get very frustrated for not being able to guide her properly. . . . I feel that I'm a terrible failure in raising my kids" (Marah). The daughter's reactionary

behaviour towards the mother's attitude of concern creates a breach in their attachment. This is the central conflict that makes mother-daughter relationships complex and strained.

But the real conflict arises when the daughter, even after forging an identity which is separate from the mother, frequently acknowledges that a part of her self is truly her mother's child. Alladi Uma rightly comments, "The mother is the culture bearer; no matter how diverse their views, the daughter is unable to reject her completely. . . . Even while a daughter may seem to be neglected by the mother, even while she questions the relationship, she cannot totally negate her mother or her influence" (71-74). This realization divides the daughter into two split personalities: she remains neither an educated and liberated self of her own choice nor a copy of the traditional daughter of her mother's dream. These conflicts of mother-daughter relationship along with other significant complex dimensions have been examined and explored in Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* and Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*.

A critical examination of these texts in question reveals that a woman's two roles – mother and daughter – are connected together with emotional and psychological ties. The mutual bond and understanding which is an essential element of their relationship, is disturbed by the imposed patriarchal consciousness. These selected works represent the entire cult of motherhood, without romanticizing or idealizing, existing in Indian culture and literature, and the different types of relationships that mothers and daughters share in the wake of patriarchal consciousness. An in-depth critical analysis of mother-daughter relationships presented in these three novels, with a special focus on their psychological dimensions, yields new insights into the mind and vision of these renowned novelists of our time.

The study has been divided into five chapters. Apart from the first chapter of introduction and the fifth chapter of conclusion, three more chapters have been devoted to study the nature and complexity of mother-daughter relationships in relation to Indian woman's life and experience. A continuity of older social forms and norms has been critically viewed, along with the changes brought about in mother-daughter relationships by responses to the new situations.

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# Chapter – 2

## Mother-Daughter Relationships in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*

In the 1980, when Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* was published, Feminist Literary Movement was at its zenith, touching highly sensitive issues with new modes of interpretation. For this reason, the novel has been first interpreted from a feminist point of view. Critics like Shubha Tiwari, Charu Chandra Mishra and Siddhartha Sharma have paid their due attention to the woman question in their respective studies. Thematic studies have been carried out by such critics as Premila Paul and Aparna Sundaram. Paul deals with the theme of confrontation as forming the central part of the novel; whereas Sundaram comments on the themes of marriage, sexual violence and Indian masculinity. The issues of gender-discrimination and identity formation have remained the concern of such critics as Nalinabh Tripathi and Beena Agarwal. A few critics like Mrinalini Sebastian have also interpreted *The Dark Holds No Terrors* as a postcolonial text. The studies in the psychological regression are conducted by critics like Arindam Chatterji. Thus the existing criticism on *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is quite insightful and penetrating, but basically aims at questioning the patriarchal system in one way or the other. Although, critics and scholars have taken up and discussed various problems faced by the woman in the contemporary male dominated society – gender discrimination, inequality of sexes, and male chauvinism – yet the strange mother-daughter relationship is centrally significant to the understanding of this novel. The studies in the mother- daughter relationships have been conducted by scholars like Rashmi Sahi and Rashmi Gaur. Sahi focuses on the influence of mother on the daughter's personality in general; and gender-bias and lovelessness existing in this relationship in particular. But her study is not psychologically penetrating, lingering merely on the surface level of this relationship. Though she has sincerely attempted to rephrase the sufferings of the daughter at the hands of her mother, but the question what are the psychological implications of these sufferings on mother-daughter relationship has not been adequately answered by her. On the other hand, discussing the basic characteristics of mother-daughter bonds, Rashmi Gaur presents how a girl-child is made to feel inferior in comparison of her male counterpart, and how such a girl, a victim of gender-discrimination, turns to be a rebel against her own mother. Though Gaur considers this relationship a complex one but her essay is a limited

attempt in that it does not cover all its varied complexities, since she does not appear to bring either a new perspective or a freshness of treatment to this subject.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* by Shashi Deshpande is an insightful story of mothers and daughters in a typical patriarchal framework, foregrounding the daughter's search for her own refuge. It is the institution of patriarchy which burdens the woman with its definitions of feminine characteristics and forces her to adhere to them. The interesting fact is that this work of moulding the woman in a patriarchy-constructed feminine identity is carried out by the woman herself. Patriarchy has used mothers to instill and perpetuate its values in the children of both sexes. A woman is made to feel blessed and superior if she gives birth to a son. Various rituals are performed to celebrate her achievement. As S. Anandalakshmi opines, "The birth of a son gives a woman status and she invests herself in her son's fixture, creating a deep symbiotic bond" (31). But soon the father becomes a role model for the son and he imitates and follows in his father's footsteps. On the other hand, the entire responsibility of a daughter's upbringing is solely left to the mother. The conditioning in the patriarchal society begins early in the childhood itself. "The conditioning begins at home and women are supposed to walk from mother's womb into mother's shoes" (Choubey 112). The mother, who has already internalized the patriarchal values and standards, gives her best to socialize the daughter in the same dearly-held traditions.

This dimension of mother-daughter relationships, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, has already been probed and critically discussed by critics and scholars. But there is something more deeper and more insightful that is still left unexplored. When mother, herself a patriarchal construct, imposes patriarchal principles and values on the daughter, the daughter may submit or rebel as a reaction to it. As psychologists suggest, mothers come to symbolize dependence, regression, passivity, and the lack of adaptation to reality. Turning from mother represents independence and individuation, progress, activity, and participation in the real world. (Chodorow 82) Moreover the daughter may hate and cause injury to her mother in response to her mother's apathy, indifference or alienation. But no daughter can escape completely from the burden of being the daughter of her mother. However, such a rebellion in the daughter is caused by her access to education and social awareness. But when the daughter herself attains motherhood and becomes an experienced self, she cannot help

turning back again to her mother, if not exclusively for strength and understanding, then for measuring her present state. The same happens in the case of Saru, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. She comes back to her parental home not merely to escape from the oppression of her husband but to weigh her experiences with those experiences of her mother; and thus to attain a balanced view of her relationship with her mother. Therefore it becomes interesting to examine how the relationships between mothers and daughters become strained and complex in the wake of gender discrimination in Shashi Deshpande's present novel.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* essentially deals with Saru, the daughter, who, tormented and depressed as she is, comes back to her parental home in order to relive her relationship with her dead mother, whose painful memories constantly haunt her. But Premila Paul is of the view, "The stay in her father's house gives Sarita a chance to review her relationship with the husband, her dead mother, dead brother Dhruva and her children, Renu and Abhi" (30). It suggests that the mother-daughter relationship in this novel cannot be understood in isolation; it has to be seen along with other intimate relationships. However, even after accomplishing herself as a doctor, there is no fulfillment or satisfaction in Sarita's life. A sense of insecurity and unwantedness still persists in her unconscious mind. Rashmi Gaur very aptly encapsulates Saru's dilemma:

> The girl-child Saru grows up as a victim of her mother's sexist and gender-based bias; which reduces her later life into a desperate struggle to overcome the initial victimization, to justify her decisions to her mother who no longer acknowledges her as a daughter, and to find out a new meaning to her life which could enable her to develop and nurture a balanced perspective towards her diversified roles as a mother, as a wife, and as a career woman. (88)

Since her childhood, Saru pines for love and affection. Even her birth in the family is treated as a bad omen. Saru states candidly, "But of my birth, my mother had said to me once . . . 'It rained heavily the day you were born. It was terrible.' And somehow, it seemed to me that it was my birth that was terrible for her, not the rains" (Deshpande 169). Her mother, however, dotes on her younger brother Dhruva and neglects her craving to be loved. Hence, Saru possesses no good memory of her mother: "I can only remember that she cursed me as no mother should" (Deshpande 25).

The mother acts as a mirror for the daughter to conceive a distinct identity for herself. It's because every daughter is 'quite a little mother' full of possibilities and every mother is full of experience of being a daughter. Therefore the daughter sees herself in her mother and this identification leads her to constitute her selfhood. But Saru's mother reflects a negative image of her daughter. Saru painfully remembers, "I was an ugly girl. At least, my mother told me so. I can remember her eyeing me dispassionately, saying . . . You will never be good looking. You are too dark for that" (Deshpande 61). Saru is thus made to naturalize a negative image of herself. However she is further trained in the values of a male dominated society. Her mother says, "You should be careful now about how you behave. Don't come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it's only your father who's around" (Deshpande 62). Saru is made to feel ashamed of her own feminine body when she approaches puberty. She is given a straw mat to sleep on and is served from a distance. The status of a pariah is offered to her and she feels, "A kind of shame that engulfed me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my mother" (62).

However, Saru's mother keenly seeks to shape her daughter after herself. Being a traditional mother, she is very careful about her daughter's looks which should one day tempt a man for her to marry. She dictates:

> Don't go out in the sun. You'll get even darker.
>
> Who cares?
>
> We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married.
>
> I don't want to get married.
>
> Will you live with us all your life?
>
> Why not?
>
> You can't.
>
> And Dhruva?
>
> He's different. He is a boy. (Deshpande 45)

Thus Saru is made to feel inferior to her brother in her early childhood. He enjoys all the privileges of being a son while Saru is denied even her own share of love. Each time she is the scapegoat and Dhruva is the object of attention. "The mother had been invariably stern with Dhruva; but, child though she was, she had known even then that the sternness was only a crust: that to her mother, compared to Dhruva, she herself was nothing" (Deshpande 84). Such discrimination on the part of the mother results in sibling rivalry. In this context Rashmi Sahi observes, "When a mother differentiates between her own children the boy and the girl for whom she has equally suffered and taken equal pains, there is no other torch bearer than for the girl child" (20-21).

In her relationship with her kid brother, Dhruva, Saru unknowingly becomes dominating like her mother. The reason is that because of the initial identification of the child with its mother, it internalizes some of the features of mother's behavior and later recreates them in its future relationships. This is what Nancy Chodorow also says:

> In later life, a person's early relation to her or his mother leads to a preoccupation with issues of primary intimacy and merging. On one psychological level, all people who have experienced primary love and primary identification have some aspect of self that wants to recreate these experiences, and most people try to do so. (79)

Though Saru loves Dhruva and cares for him, but she detests him too for the advantages which he enjoys for being a son. Deshpande reveals through their relationship the social aspect of keen sibling jealousy born of a mother's undue fondness for the son. As Charu Chandra Mishra is of the view, "It seems, at first, that against the patriarchal power of domination, her relationship with Dhruva forms the battle ground on which she is fighting for a space of her own" (97). There is three years gap between them. But Saru has a great advantage of being elder to him. It is only Dhruva who makes her feel important and she has an absolute control over him. Saru wistfully remembers, "She had ruled over him completely. No dictatorship could have been more absolute. And yet he had his revenges" (Deshpande 35). Dhruva has been terrified of the dark. During night he comes crawling into her bed. For Dhruva, thus, Saru acts as a surrogate mother in whose company dark holds no terrors for him. However the accidental death of Dhruva leaves Saru shocked and bewildered. But her mother's hatred for her does not spare Saru even at this critical moment. Saru mother blames

her innocent daughter for her brother's death whereas G. Dominic Savio believes, "Dhruva's demise had always been her subconscious desire and there is a very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment" (61). Saru is made to feel guilty of the deed which she has not done consciously or unconsciously. Her mother holds Saru responsible for Dhruva's death and retorts, "You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead?" (Deshpande 191). These words of her mother, then, keep haunting Saru throughout her life, proclaiming her a murderer of her own brother. This nasty blow of her mother leaves Saru completely shattered and consequently a severe detestation shrouds their future relationship. Charu Chandra Mishra points out, "Throughout the novel this guilt consciousness seems to act like a fatal flaw at times driving her to a mental state bordering on schizophrenia. This is the turning point in the novel that brings the mother-daughter conflict to the forefront" (97).

Saru shares the same kind of strained relationship with her father as well. As Sunita Reddy opines, "If her mother had provoked her by her blatant hostility, her father had contributed to her present predicament by remaining a mute spectator in the family drama" (qtd. in Sharma 30). Her father never takes any responsibility of his daughter and leaves everything to the mother. "He never took any interest in my school or college. He left it all to her. And she never really cared. Not after Dhruva's death, I didn't exist for her. I died long before I left home" (Deshpande 32). Sometimes, Saru tries to seek his attention, but he always dotes on his son, Dhruva. Like her mother, her father too does not care for his daughter's desires and dreams. The prejudice of her father that girls are mother's responsibility makes her nervous. She has an intense longing for filial affection. Saru contemplates on her situation: "The reserve was perhaps part of an old-fashioned attitude that daughters are their mothers' business. But my mother had nothing for me, either. Whose business was I then?" (Deshpande 105). Saru's father rarely speaks to her; and this communication gap renders their relationship strained.

The fear of being betrayed or being rejected remains rooted in Saru's consciousness. The roots of her isolation lie in her own childhood experiences. Beena Agarwal observes:

> Saru's presence in the family was treated as a curse to the family because her mother considered Saru responsible for the death of Dhruva. The negligence of mother,

> indifference of father and the burden of the guilt of the death of brother, enforced Saru to leave her parental home to seek spaces in professional life. (33)

Saru decides to join medical college to study medicine. But her mother does not approve it. She prefers a simple BSC for Saru to graduate so that she can be easily married off after that. This infuriates Saru and she spits, "I'm not talking to you. I'm not asking you for anything. I know what your answer will be. No, forever a 'no' to anything I want. You don't want me to have anything, you don't want me to do anything. You don't even want me to live" (Deshpande 142). Saru considers her mother her biggest enemy, because she tries to curtail her freedom and professional career. Simone de Beauvoir comments:

> Real conflicts arise when the girl grows older; as we have seen, she wishes to establish her independence from her mother. This seems to the mother a mark of hateful ingratitude; she tries obstinately to checkmate the girl's will to escape; she cannot bear to have her double become an other. (534)

Saru's relationship, at this stage, with her mother becomes so much strained that she now wants a total freedom from her mother's dominance. And the medical degree seems her passport to this freedom. But Saru's mother objects to her father's decision and pleads to reject this career option in the name of hostel expenses and her marriage. She blurts out, "And don't forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both? Make yourself a pauper, and will she look after you in your old age?" (Deshpande 144). But this time Saru's father takes his daughter's side. This act of her father spoils his loyalty to his wife and her mother feels hurt badly. This further raises her mother's temper and she accuses Saru harshly, "That's what you think. What do you know of other's feelings? When have you ever cared about anyone's feelings but your own? As long as you can have your own way, you aren't bothered about anything at all. Your own brother . . . She killed her brother. She killed her brother" (Deshpande 145). Thus Saru's mother never lets her get rid of guilt consciousness. She incessantly keeps on reminding her of that traumatic accident. Consequently, this leaves an indelible guilt feeling in her mind and Saru begins to hate her mother. K. M. Pandey is of the view, "Through this and other examples in the novel Shashi Deshpande conveys an important

message that suppression, subjugation and exploitation are not confined to the male-female relationship but exist between a female-female relationship as well" (52).

Saru becomes restless to get admiration, social recognition and professional success to seek a space equal to her brother. She completely devotes herself to get medical degree that seems to her the sole mean to attain freedom. However, her wish to be a doctor is instilled in Saru by her mother's neglect. Once Saru states: "No, I couldn't. I had to work hard, to be a success, to show them . . . her . . . something. What? I didn't know. But I had to make myself secure so that no one would ever say to me again . . . why are you alive?" (Deshpande 50).Thus whatever happens in Saru's life is related, directly or indirectly, to her relationship with her mother. She cannot shake off her mother's influence wholly even after separating herself from her. As Nancy Chodorow mentions:

> A very young child, for instance, may feel invulnerable and all-powerful because it has introjected, or taken as an internal object, a nourishing and protecting maternal image, which is now experienced continuously whether or not its mother is actually there. Alternately, it may feel rejected and alone whether or not its mother is actually there, because it has taken as internal object an image of her as rejecting and denying gratification. (42-43)

Constant neglect and rejection of her daughter by Saru's mother has so badly affected Saru's psyche that now it seems almost impossible for her to believe that she can be somebody's beloved. "Insofar as aspects of the maternal relationship are unsatisfactory, or such that the infant feels rejected or unloved, it is likely to define itself as rejected, or as someone who drives love away" (Chodorow 78). Hitherto devoid of love, her heart cannot easily admit the thought that she can be the center of attention. Saru states candidly, "I thought no male would take that kind of an interest in me. Yet, there was one" (Deshpande 91). This shows that Saru has been suffering from inferiority complex. There is always an insecurity and uncertainty about her, making her self-conscious every time. She remarks, "And yet there was always a gnawing disbelief . . . how could I be anyone's beloved? I was the redundant, the unwanted, an appendage one could do without. It was impossible for anyone to want me, love me, need me" (Deshpande 66). The shadows of childhood insecurity have grabbed her so intensely that now it seems very hard for her to break through them. She keeps on meditating on her

childhood and this adversely affects her relationship with Manohar. Saru's barren heart becomes fertile in the company of a professor, Manohar. An aura of knowledge about him fascinates Saru towards Manohar. When he too responds to her feelings, she, for a moment, cannot believe it. She thus gives words to her feelings:

> It was impossible that I could mean so much to any human being. It was impossible that such things could happen to me. They happened only to girls in movies and books, not to girls like me. And yet, I could not doubt his love. He cared for my feelings as no one had ever done. (Deshpande 39)

Her mother's hostility has created in Saru a dislike so strong that she develops a habit of doing everything that her mother opposes. When Saru tells her mother about Manohar, she asks:

> What caste is he?
>
> I don't know.
>
> A Brahmin?
>
> Of course not.
>
> Then, cruelly . . . his father keeps a cycle shop.
>
> Oh, so they are low-caste people, are they? (96)

Such words of her mother, full of disgust, prejudice and hatred, enrages Saru so much that she becomes adamant to marry this man only. Unfortunately this impulsive decision of Saru has made a hell of her life. She painfully utters, "If you hadn't fought me so bitterly, if you hadn't been so against him, perhaps I would never have married him. And I would not have been here, cringing from the sight of letters, fighting with terror at the sight of his handwriting, hating him and yet pitying him too" (Deshpande 96). Thus a kind of madness has overtaken Saru resulting from her mother's hostility to her.

"Ironically, a female can be made an agency for the effective promotion of a male point of view as in the case of Saru's mother" (Tripathi 43). Therefore to blame the mother alone for the miseries of Saru would be a rather partial view of the situation. Besides mother, it is the

institution of patriarchy and the wrong or biased conditioning of the daughter that are to be blamed. Saru, at one place, meditates on her grandmother who was deserted by her husband, leaving her behind with two little daughters, one being her own mother. It was said that her grandfather had opted for Sanyas, a total renunciation of the material world. It was, however, her grandmother's father who then looked after them and got the girls married. "But there had been, obviously, the burden of being unwanted, of being a dependent. Yet her grandmother had never, so she had heard, complained. It's my luck, she said. My fate. It was written on my forehead" (Deshpande 70). Thus, Saru's mother's own childhood is spent with the feeling of unwantedness and dependency on others. Hence she has internalized these feelings of rejection and negligence as part of a girl's life. She creates exactly the same kind of atmosphere for Saru as she had once received in her own mother's home. As Simone de Beauvoir observes;

> But why should her daughter, this other woman, enjoy advantages denied to her? Ensnared in 'serious' matters herself, she is envious of all the occupations and amusements that take the girl out of the boredom of the home; this escape gives the lie to all the values to which she has sacrificed herself. (535)

For Saru's grandmother the need of the time was to get her daughters married. The same concern for the daughter she has transferred to Saru's mother. Therefore being a typical product of patriarchal conditioning, Saru's mother wants for her daughter a marriage and not a career in medicine. When Saru rebels against her mother's choices, she becomes hostile to her daughter. "But then it had been a kind of miracle anyway, her joining medical college in spite of her mother. Standing up against her, asserting her will against her . . . that had seemed impossible" (Deshpande 139). This victory of Saru against her mother's constant rejection creates a breach between mother and daughter, and alienates them from each other.

Saru's obsessive remembrance of the mother is indicative of both her sense of guilt and her sense of defeat. It signifies that Saru is guilt obsessed and this guilt does not permit her to seek wholeness in personal relationship. She concedes, "It seemed incredible to me that I could evoke an emotion so strong in anyone. That anyone could care for me in that way and to that extent" (Deshpande 65). Moreover, it was her mother who made her dream of finding happiness through a man. But this does not work for her and she finds disappointment in it.

Beena Agarwal points out, "Saru's decision of marriage as a compensation for her loss was an error on her part that adversely affected her perception and expectations in personal life" (36). It is Saru's relationship with her mother, bereft of any emotional bond, which renders her emotionally starved in her married life too. Each of her physical contacts with Manohar merely satisfies her bodily cravings without touching her being. Saru wistfully captures the scene:

> But when we got married it was like nothing I had ever imagined. After the first moment of apprehension . . . a purely physical response or lack of it, rather . . . there was never any withholding in me. I became in an instant a physically aroused woman, with an infinite capacity for loving and giving, with a passionate desire to be absorbed by the man I loved. (Deshpande 40)

Thus in spite of being physically fulfilled Saru remains emotionally unsatisfied. It is the void created in her by her childhood neglect which she now seeks to fill. "I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted. If I ever had any doubts, I had only to turn to him and ask him to prove his love for me. And he would . . . again and again and again" (40).

But the fear of being rejected is so intensely ingrained in Saru's psyche that it leaves no room for fulfillment. Shubha Tiwari comments, "A child who is not loved and cared by his/her parents is likely to develop deep rooted sense of fear, insecurity, and rejection" (87). And soon she realizes that happiness is a mere mirage. Saru remembers how a particular incident becomes a turning point in their blissful marital relationship. One day an interviewer asks Manohar, "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but the bread as well" (Deshpande 35-36). This comment hurts Manohar's ego so badly that he turns out to be a sadist. He cannot tolerate his wife to be more successful and respected than himself. So he takes vengeance for this on her in bed. Saru states, "He attacked me. He attacked me like an animal that night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this . . . this man hurting me. With his hands, his teeth, his whole body" (Deshpande 201). In the day time, however, Manohar behaves like a normal man. Sometimes she thinks it to be a mere hallucination but what about the bruises. Saru wonders how can be a man so divided in himself. She never questions Manohar for such inhuman behavior because "her early relationship with her

mother had moulded her psyche to accept drudgery and self-negation as norms of routine existence and to treat herself as an undesirable parson in a sub-conscious manner" (Gaur 99). Now love and romance seem to her mere illusions. In the name of love there is only brutal act of sex frightening the already scared child in her. Saru feels, "And still, for long the fear was there; the secret fear that behind each loving word, behind each kiss, lay the enemy, the snake, the monster of rejection" (Deshpande 66).

A daughter usually confides her secrets into her mother's bosom but unfortunately that source is missing in Saru's life, not for her mother is dead now but because no tacit understanding ever exists between them. She has nobody in her life to share secret pains and unburden her heart. "The urge to confide in someone, to talk to someone, was growing in her. Often she had found herself staring at people, weighing them up, thinking . . . are you on my side? Are you? And, even more often, waking up at night with a start, thinking . . . I am alone" (Deshpande 43). What is more pitiable about Saru is that she begins to perceive herself from the parameters of her mother. The daughter who "wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer" (Deshpande 142) finds herself hurt, wounded and suffering from her mother's curse. Saru confides in her father, "She cursed me, Baba. . . . Even her silence at the end was a curse. And you say she died peacefully. . . . Does a death redeem a whole life? Can't you understand, Baba, that it's because she cursed me that I am like this?" (Deshpande 197).

A sense of guilt engulfed Saru when she realizes that she has deserted her mother. She wonders, "Will Renu turn mocking eyes on me one day? Will Abhi defy me? Will they betray me as I betrayed her?" (Deshpande 139). She attempts to identify herself with her mother not in the role of mother but as being a woman. Once she has thought that "If you're a woman, I don't want to be one" (Deshpande 63). But now she compares her situation with her mother and finds, ". . . my mother had no room of her own. She retreated into the kitchen to dress up, she sat in the dingy room to comb her hair and apply kumkum, she slept in her bed like any overnight guest in a strange place. And I have so much my mother lacked. But neither she nor I have that thing 'a room of our own'" (Deshpande 135-36). Once Saru has thought that "to get married, and end up doing just what your mother did, seemed to me not only terrible but damnable" (Deshpande 140). But in her attempt to divorce herself

completely from her mother, and to be a sheer opposite of her mother, Saru ends up becoming a parable of Indian womanhood. Like a traditional woman she wants to make her marriage a success. Her profession of a doctor has left no space for her to be a good wife and a loving mother. Sometimes she imagines:

> I saw myself, the end of my sari tucked into my waist, hair tied into a neat knot, smiling at them all as I served them. And all of them smiled back at me. A mother in an ad, in a movie, dressed in a crisply starched, ironed sari. Wife and mother, loving and beloved. A picture of grace, harmony and happiness. Could I not achieve that? (80)

Even after becoming independent there is lack of happiness, fulfillment and harmony in Saru's life. Therefore she wants to search them in the life of a traditional woman. She now, at her father's home, cooks for Madhav and her father, keeps the house clean, washes the cloth herself, and lives confined in the four walls of the house. "The gestures, the actions, the very words that accompanied them were, though she did not realize it, her mother's. As if she was unconsciously, unknown to herself, mimicking the mother she had never admired, never endeavoured to imitate" (Deshpande 106). Thus despite her deliberate attempts to remain split off from her mother, Saru sometimes finds herself acting out the role of her mother.

Saru's fears, uncertainties and insecurities are not merely confined to her relationship with her mother but they also exist in her relationship with her children. Saru once mentions, "It had been in her for some time now, a feeling that her unhappiness was a taint that would eventually stain them as well" (Deshpande 134). Saru notices strangeness in her daughter Renu's behavior. Saru describes, "She stares at me critically at times, a cold, shrewd, objective observer behind those little girl's eyes of hers. And I become nervous, unsure, uncertain of myself" (Deshpande 33). Sometimes, it seems to Saru that the sterility and monotony of her own life is badly affecting her daughter's life too. Renu, however, mirrors her own mother's anguish and depression. Saru states distinctly, "She does not talk much. She reminds me of a room whose doors are closed. Nothing emerges, neither joys nor her sorrows. And I sense a lack of feeling, of sensitivity in her" (Deshpande 33). Even in her paintings, Renu draws thick forest shrouded by darkness, a kind of manifestation of her inner landscape. With that mystery about her, Renu represents her grandmother. "And yet she knew how often Renu reminded her of her mother. Her quiet watchfulness. The feeling she gave

you of being weighed up, criticized, possibly rejected" (Deshpande 34). Consequently, Saru sometimes, uncertain about herself, wonders whether she is an unnatural, unloving mother? She decides that she would give her children their due love and care which she herself has never received from her mother. So that they would not blame her the way she blames her mother. However, the kind of mother that Saru wishes to become has been described by Simone de Beauvoir as women who are "sufficiently satisfied with life to desire reincarnation in a daughter or at least to accept a daughter without disappointment; they will want to give the child the opportunities they have had and also those they have missed" (533).

However Saru sees herself and her brother, Dhruva, in her own children. She senses sibling rivalry between Abhi and Renu that once existed in her relationship with Dhruva. On her birthday, Renu complains to her mother, "Why do you always scold me? You never scold him. You never say anything to him. It's not fair. It's my birthday, my presents. And he cried and spoilt everything. And now you scold me. You always scold me. It's not fair, not fair" (Deshpande 173). Saru's own childhood fears again become alive and she thinks that life is an endless repetition of the same pattern. In this context Beena Agarwal makes a powerful observation, "The fault lies in the social structure in which bitterness of binary relationship passes from one generation to another generation" (45).

Saru's feeling of being unwanted and rejected is so acute that she begins to hate her own existence both as a wife and mother. "She was not a wife, not a mother, not a professional woman whom others looked up to. She was the wronged child again, the unloved daughter, the scapegoat" (Deshpande 182). For Saru, there is no one to sooth her, comfort her. The words of her mother, "You killed him. Why don't you die? Why are you alive, when he is dead?" (191), keep haunting her. Saru remains guilt conscious first for being blamed for Dhruva's death and second for deserting her mother. She thinks, "Her cruelty to Dhruva, to her mother, to Manu . . . she would never be rid of it. She would carry this ugly, unbearable burden until she died" (Deshpande 212 ). Saru's mother was in a habit of finding fault with her daughter. As a result, Saru loses confidence and begins to blame herself. She thinks that now no forgiveness is possible. She confesses to her father, "My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood" (Deshpande 217). Her perception of

life has changed completely and she begins to conceive life from a traditional woman's point of view. Saru thinks, "It's my fault again. If mine had been an arrange marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this?" (Deshpande 218).

Shashi Deshpande, in one of her interviews, said that: "Being mother, daughter, wife is important for a woman but that is not the be all and end all of her existence" (qtd. in Sahi 22). Therefore, the end part of the novel shows Saru accepting her loneliness and simultaneously attempting to reconcile and negotiate with her mother's memories and her guilt and doubts. Saru contemplates:

> They came to her then, all those selves she had rejected so resolutely at first, and so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife . . . persons spiked with guilts. Yes, she was all of them, she could not deny that now. She had to accept these selves to become whole again. (Deshpande 220)

A better realization of her relationship with her mother descends on Saru when she tries to accept the elements she hitherto neglects and detests because they, in one way or the other, belong to her mother. What Premila Paul feels about Saru is that: "Though she tries to learn from the mother what not to be, she ends up as an educated version of the mother herself" (35). Saru's coming back to her mother's home suggests a daughter's effort to understand her mother's behavior. When Saru puts her feet into her mother's shoes, then she realizes what it is to be a mother in the patriarchal society. The values which a mother tries to instill in her daughter and restrictions which she put on her are merely the modes of survival in patriarchy. Perhaps mother believes in the simple dictum that it's difficult to remove every stone from the road, but it's easy to protect feet with slippers.

In patriarchy only time changes but the woman's condition is still the same as it was centuries ago. Time changes and so do the things; but how much actually and in what proportion? Various attempts have been made, bulky books have been written occupying a considerable space in the libraries, cases are filed in the courts, processions are taken out, newspapers are full of women's pitiable stories, political parties proclaim a better social status for women; but the question is: has it brought any significant change in woman's condition? Unfortunately the answer is 'No'. However, the novel, *The Dark Holds No*

*Terrors*, does not limit itself to depict the complex mother-daughter relationships. With a woman as the central figure, Shashi Deshpande probes the universally relevant issues of human relationships. What Saru accepts at the end is applicable to all human beings. She declares, "All right, so I'm alone. But so's everyone else. Human beings . . . they're going to fail you. But because there's just us, because there's no else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves we're sunk" (Deshpande 220). When Saru confronts this nothingness positively, a strange kind of feeling grapples her. "She was overcome by a queer sensation, as if everything was unreal. Her own body felt insubstantial. There was a feeling of weightlessness that made her almost euphoric" (Deshpande 219).

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# Chapter – 3

## Mother-Daughter Relationships in *Difficult Daughters*

Manju Kapur's debut novel *Difficult Daughters* came in 1998, and was hailed as a significant contribution to the female phase of feminist movement. Being a woman writer, Manju Kapur is essentially acknowledged by critics as a novelist who speaks about women and for women in the complex web of patriarchal Hindu society. Thus, feminist issues, firmly incorporated in her novel, have received a considerable amount of critical attention in recent years. Christopher Rollason talks about the idea of female independence; whereas critics like Shaleen Kumar Singh find the clash of tradition and modernity at the center of the novel. Another group of critics like Shilpi Rishi Srivastava, Sangeeta Mehta and Ruby Milhoutra focus on the emergence of 'New Woman' and her search for identity and autonomy in *Difficult Daughters*. There are also critics, including Binod Mishra and Reena Mitra, who attempt at analyzing the novel from a humanitarian standpoint. Critics like Indira Bhatt explore the issue of marriage in *Difficult Daughters*. Kapur's present novel has also been interpreted as a post-colonial piece by critics like Sunita Sinha and O. P. Dwivedi. Within this huge corpus of critical works there still remains a critical dearth of studies on mother and daughter relationships.

Manju Kapur is a writer committed to human relationships that are found to be scattered throughout her fictional world, and *Difficult Daughters* is no exception. Hers is a world where relationships dominate and determine, in their contrast and complexity, the lives of her characters. Herself very much attached to her mother, Kapur seems to be fascinated with the mother figure. Such inclination of Manju Kapur towards the mother and her representation of motherhood has obligated few critics to search out and explore the mother-daughter relationships as depicted in her novel, *Difficult Daughters*. Asha Choubey in her comparative study of Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* makes a very comprehensive analysis of how the life of the daughter is influenced or marred by that of the mother. But her paper focuses merely on the maternal apathy, indifference and alienation, almost excluding every other dimension of this relationship. On the other hand, Jaydeep Rishi seeks to dwell upon the complex nature of mother-daughter ties as portrayed in this novel without probing their varied complexities. However, the fundamental limitation of these

critics is that they tend to analyze mother-daughter relationships in isolation. These relationships, complex as they are, cannot be understood in isolation; rather they have to be viewed in relation to all other possible relationships. Such an intensive study, encompassing all mutually connected relationships, can reveal the hitherto latent dimensions and complexities which are intricately integrated in mother-daughter bonds. Therefore, the objective of this attempt is to explore the love and hate relationships, including their varieties and complexities, existing between mothers and daughters in Manju Kapur's present novel.

Manju Kapur's award winning novel, *Difficult Daughters*, primarily deals with both mothers and daughters and the complicated relationships which they share. Sudarshan Sharma points out that "It is a first-rate realistic novel about a daughter's reconstruction of her troubled past hinging on her mother's story describing how she was as a daughter" (46). The novel reveals the attitude of three generations of women- Kasturi (Virmati's mother), Virmati and Ida (Virmati's daughter). In other words, it captures the complex relationships between mothers and daughters over a period of three generations. Mother is supposed to be the root and daughter the fruit of this relationship. If fruit does not receive proper nourishment from the root, its growth and development can be marred. "The character of the infant's early relation to its mother profoundly affects its sense of self, its later object-relationships, and its feelings about its mother and about women in general" (Chodorow 77). This book, however, is a memorial to a mother (Virmati) from her daughter (Ida) to establish the value of that mother who has been thoroughly misunderstood by her daughter. Ida, in her journey to her mother's past encounters different phases and stages in her relationship with her mother.

Ida, a divorcee and childless lady, with a heavy heart after her mother's death, confesses: "Without her, I am lost. I look for ways to connect" (Kapur 4). Ida remains a difficult daughter for her mother throughout her childhood and after. The fundamental conflict in Ida's life is what she declares in the very first sentence of the novel, "The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother" (Kapur 1), and what she accepts in the epilogue, "I grew up struggling to be the model daughter" (279). What makes Ida a difficult daughter is her negation of the ideal daughterhood, which has supreme value in her mother's estimation. Moreover, being husbandless, childless and parentless, Ida has "no brave causes left" for her

to live. To add to this, her mother's painful memories keep haunting her. Therefore, she makes an insightful attempt to recapture the history of her mother's life; so that she can have a better understanding of her relationship with her mother and of herself. In this context Kusum Lata Sawhney's observation is worth quoting:

> When you are a teenager, she [mother] is the most out-of-touch person who just does not understand you. We want her approval all the time and become irritable and disappointed when she is critical, for, she seems to only notice our flaws! When we are in our twenties and thirties, we again change and, hopefully, we become friends again. This is because you have matured or because marriage and childbirth also make you understand yourself better and in doing so you also have further insight into your relationship. (1)

Hence, when the daughter takes to writing about her mother, this is actually her attempt to search out her own roots, identity and strength. Hitherto, Ida has a partial view of her mother's life. She wants to know the daughterhood of her mother, and thus tends to identify herself with her.

Judith Kegan Gardiner observes that "the word 'identity' is paradoxical in itself, meaning both sameness and distinctiveness, and its contradictions proliferate when it is applied to women" (347). In the light of the above statement, it can be concluded that "identity" for a female is both identification with the mother and a distinct self. This contradiction is the result of the fact that mothers are not all that doting, sacrificing ones, but are also instruments through which the patriarchal society exercises its values. In this context Asha Choubey aptly observes: "Feminists, however, have deprived motherhood of much of its halo. The kind of motherhood that has been celebrated through tradition is a myth created by the male of the species to chain their womenfolk" (107). Thus, the dominating circumstances shape the mother-daughter relationships in society. In her attempt to get recognition, the girl child, daughter, protests to be different from the mother. But when she herself attains motherhood, only then the daughter tends to identify herself with the mother.

Virmati, in *Difficult Daughters*, is the eldest daughter out of eleven children born to Kasturi in a respectable 'Arya Smaji' business family at Amritsar. Kasturi enjoys her

fecundity and every year gives birth to a child. At an early stage of her childhood, Virmati is taken for granted by her mother to rear and care for her younger siblings. Hence, she has to play the role of a second mother for her brothers and sisters. Consequently, her own childhood remains devoid of maternal care. Since her childhood, Virmati, like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors,* longs for love and affection but does not get any. "At times Virmati yearned for affection, for some sign that she was special" (Kapur 6). But at every point Virmati is made to feel responsible for the family and her mother's offspring. If she ever attempts to protest, her mother spits, "You are the eldest. If you don't see to things, who will?" (Kapur 7). Most of the time her mother remains either sick or pregnant, and the entire household is left for Virmati to manage. The daily domestic chores consume much time of the day and this affects Virmati's studies. Despite her consistent efforts, she cannot perform well in studies. But Kasturi can never understand the restlessness of her daughter. For her to get married and settle down is the sole career that a girl must aspire for. She once comments, "Why was her daughter so restless all the time? In a girl, that spelt disaster" (Kapur 12).

There is one more significant mother-daughter relationship between Shakuntala (Virmati's cousin) and Lajwanti (Shakuntala's mother) which has a very strong bearing on Virmati and her relationship with her mother. Shakuntala is a well-educated and socially aware girl who teaches in Lahore. She is unmarried and lives independently at her own terms. "Normally few dared to mention Shakuntala's unmarried state, each remark was such an insult to the mother" (Kapur 15). This is because the mother considers the daughter as her double. Therefore, when her daughter is criticized, she takes it to be a criticism of herself and her values which she has once implanted in her daughter. For this reason, Lajwanti too gets irritated, "When will this girl settle down? . . . All the time in the lab, doing experiments, helping the girls, studying or going to conferences. I tell her she should have been a man" (Kapur 16). However, there is something peculiar about Shakuntala's relationship with her mother: though Lajwanti is critical of her daughter's unmarried status and her strange ways to live life, but she, unlike Kasturi, cares for and usually takes her daughter's side. At their Dalhousie stay, when Virmati reveals her wish to meet Shakuntala, Lajwanti said appraisingly, "How can anyone see her when she has no time? Such a talented teacher, so popular, what an inspiring example she is for the younger ones" (Kapur 15). Though she is appreciative of Shakuntala's achievements but being a mother in a patriarchal society, she

fears for her daughter's future. But this dimension is found to be lacking in the relationship which Virmati and Kasturi share with each other. Kasturi never appreciates her daughter, never gives any sign of affection, and always passes discouraging remarks about Virmati. Such treatment of the mother leaves Virmati baffled and starved for love and affection.

Virmati's relationship with her cousin sister, Shakuntala, also contributes vitally to her changing outlook towards her mother. She tends to identify herself with her cousin and minutely observes the changes that Lahore has wrought in her: "She looked vibrant and intelligent, as though she had a life of her own. Her manner was expensive, she didn't look shyly around for approval when she spoke or acted" (Kapur 16). This fascinates Virmati and seeds of aspiration are planted in her by her glamorous cousin. Shakuntala once remarks, "These people don't really understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else" (Kapur 17). Consequently, the seeds of protest begin to grow in the submissive daughter. "I want to be like you, Pehnji," said Virmati, "If there are two of us, then they will not mind so much" (17). Virmati starts following Shakuntala and she becomes a role model for her. Now Virmati, too, longs for the freedom which her cousin enjoys without any kind of inhibition. "She watched her ride horses, smoke, play cards and badminton, act without her mother's advice, . . . . Above all, she never seemed to question or doubt herself in anything" (Kapur 18). This sister-sister relationship plays a dominant part in shaping the further conflicting nature of Virmati's relationship with her mother. Virmati is now ready to fight with her mother, to assert her individual rights, similar to Shakuntala's. She wishes to shake off the mask of submission given to her by her mother. This makes Kasturi restless and she says disapprovingly, "Study means developing the mind for the benefit of the family. I studied too, but my mother would have killed me if I had dared even to want to dress in anything other than was bought for me" (Kapur 17).

Kasturi's own relationship with her mother is not compatible enough. Once she is caught praying to a picture of Christ. "Her mother had torn the picture, screamed and shouted, and threatened to marry her off, before she brought further disgrace to the family" (Kapur 61). Kasturi's mother is a tradition bound woman for whom education is merely a gateway of

marriage. “In most of the cases the mother figures accept the socially imposed constructs which make them simultaneously the worst victims and the most vocal supporters of patriarchal values” (Rishi 91). Her father, a firm believer in Swami Dyanand’s doctrines, pays due attention, despite the mother’s disapproval, to Kasturi’s education. And thus, she becomes the first girl in their family whose marriage is postponed for a tentative period. But after the period of five years, her formal education was over. “After she graduated, her education continued in the home. Her mother tried to ensure her future happiness by the impeccable nature of her daughter’s qualifications. She was going to please her in-laws” (Kapur 62). Kasturi is thus conditioned by her mother to consider marriage as the ultimate aim of a woman’s life. Asha Choubey rightly states:

> Mothers, being women, were themselves conditioned by their mothers first and the society at large next. Mothers take it as their duty to condition their girl child into the norms of the patriarchal society. The sooner the process is begun, the better it is for the daughter. (113)

Kasturi is educated in sewing, stitching and other domestic chores. Her mother never allows her to take her own decisions.

A mother thus, conditioned and trained in traditional ways of patriarchal society, transfers these values and standards to her daughter. “The conditioning begins at home and women are supposed to walk from mother’s womb to mother’s shoes” (Choubey 112). Moreover, how Kasturi can afford to grant Virmati her share of freedom when she herself could not get any. Because most of the mothers firmly believe in what Simone de Beauvoir says:

> She also tends to inflict upon her the disadvantages from which she has suffered. Sometimes she tries to impose on the child exactly her own fate: ‘what was good enough for me is good enough for you; I was brought up this way, you shall share my lot’. (533-34)

Similarly, not much attention is paid to Virmati’s education. When she is in Dalhousie taking care of her mother, “she could hear her mother telling her not to waste her time [over studies], there were more things to do” (Kapur 20). Unfortunately, Virmati fails in her FA exams due to everyday household duties and responsibilities that she has to carry, much

against her will. Tears roll down her cheeks when her mother passes discouraging comments on her. She tries to defend herself but Kasturi retorts, "Leave your studies if it is going to make you so bad-tempered with your family. You are forgetting what comes first" (Kapur 21). Virmati compares her situation with that of her cousin, Shakuntala, and cross questions her mother. Kasturi feels irritated to think how can her meek daughter be so rebellious? She chides Virmati, "At your age I was already expecting you, not fighting with my mother" (Kapur 22). Kasturi can never understand why Virmati is so passionate about education. Sometimes, she wonders how education can replace marriage and home. For her education means learning the basics techniques of housekeeping. She questions Virmati, "What kind of learning was this, that deprived her of her reason? She too knew the value of education, it had got her her husband, and had filled her hours with the pleasure of reading" (Kapur 60).

Virmati like Saru, protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors,* feels as a neglected and unwanted child in her mother's home. "The language of feeling had never flowed between them, and this threat was meant to express all her thwarted yearnings" (Kapur 12). This very lack and dearth of love created in her by her mother renders Virmati vulnerable to the implorations of Harish, the professor. In his company, for the first time in life, Virmati finds herself wanted. Harish makes her feel important enough to be loved and cared for. He gives his books to Virmati to read and checks her copies for correction. Thus the professor stands in sharp contrast to Virmati's mother. He works on her dream to be independent through education, whereas her mother does not even allow her to dream. So, it's natural on the part of Virmati that she turns her attention from her mother to the professor. In this connection what psychologists say is "A girl alternates between total rejection of a mother who resents infantile dependence and attachment to her, between identification with anyone other than her mother and feeling herself her mother's double and extension" (Chodorow 138).

Virmati finds herself torn between the prestige of her family and the love of the professor. Harish promises her education, hope and a bright future; whereas her family represents restriction, prohibition and her wedding. "It seemed to Virmati that her family could talk of nothing else but her wedding. Every word they said had so little relation to her inner life that she felt fraudulent even listening to them, passively, immorally silent" (Kapur 70). Meanwhile, Virmati's marriage is fixed with Inderjeet, a canal engineer. She feels trapped

and does not find any solution. When, no way out is left for her she tries to commit suicide, but is saved. This attempt of Virmati relegates her in the eyes of her family, especially of her mother. Kasturi feels herself betrayed by her daughter. Simone de Beauvoir points out:

> In her daughter the mother does not hail a member of the superior caste; in her she seeks a double. She projects upon her daughter all the ambiguity of her relation with herself; and when the otherness of this *alter ego* manifests itself, the mother feels herself betrayed. (532)

Any insult to Virmati seems to her the insult of her own motherhood and upbringing. "She could never wipe out the stigma of having a child thoughtless enough to contemplate ending her life without consideration for what her family would suffer" (Kapur 82). Kasturi considers herself tainted by the ungrateful act of her daughter. This further creates tensions in their relationship. Virmati's family questions, "Was this all her education had taught her? To put herself before others, and damn the rest?" (Kapur 86). This question which was asked to Virmati indirectly questions Kasturi's mothering capabilities. This is unbearable for Kasturi; therefore, for the first time, Virmati is slapped by her mother across her face. "For this, I let you go to college. So that you are ruined permanently? Are you mad?" (86). This slap creates a breach in their relationship and makes Virmati more rebellious. Finally, she is locked in the godown and her younger sister Indumati is got married to Inderjeet. Such an inhuman treatment leaves Virmati shattered, longing for any sign of affection. In one of her letters to the professor, she confesses, "Long ago I used to dance and run in the rain when nobody was looking. Now I pine for drops" (Kapur 88).

Kasturi never offers her shoulder to Virmati to weep upon, never extends her hand to wipe her tears, and never outstretches her arms to embrace and console her daughter. An absolute dearth of understanding and emotional bonding becomes the hallmark of their relationship. Asha Choubey rightly comments:

> Maternal alienation can be sensed all through the thoughts and deeds of daughters. . . . The absence or lack of mother's sympathetic shoulders at home forces these daughters to look for sympathy outside in turn leads to deception. Daughters become vulnerable to outside influences. The sense of belonging that is the essence of a good relationship

is found sadly missing from this relationship which is most vital in the life of a woman. (114)

If her own mother does not care for her daughter, then who else Virmati can expect anything from. Consequently, like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, she loses the zest for life; her existence seems meaningless to her. She reveals her desire to the professor, "If I was to be a rubber doll for others to move as they willed, then I didn't want to live" (Kapur 92), and she also mentions, "I am just like the sacks of wheat and dal here, whithout my own life" (93).

For Kasturi, like Saru's mother, education has a corrupting influence on her daughter. She cannot tolerate her educated daughter to transcend the boundaries of her domestic sphere. For her, "A woman's shaan is in her home" (Kapur 16). Thus Kasturi is least concerned about educating her daughter further. She intensely seeks to shape Virmati after herself, and considers any attempt of Virmati to independence as an ungrateful act of selfishness. Hence, Kasturi here unknowingly voices the ideology that is integral to patriarchy. "She holds those values as ideal which patriarchy has taught her to be so. And when her daughter rebels against such values she takes it to be a rebellion against her own self" (Swami 68). Therefore, the question of being independent, without getting married and having her own home is beyond Kasturi's understanding. Virmati informs the professor, "Mati blames it all on college. She should have married after Inter, she keeps saying. See what this reading has done to her. She feels she knows more than her own father and mother" (Kapur 93). In this way, Virmati's education poses a threat or challenge to the authoritative and superior position held by her mother in her relationship with her offspring. "The pleasure of feeling absolutely superior- which men feel in regard to women- can be enjoyed by woman only in regard to her children, especially her daughters; she feels frustrated if she has to renounce her privilege, her authority" (Beauvoir 534). Virmati's education pinches Kasturi like a twig in her eyes. Virmati painfully tells this to the professor in her letter, "My mother keeps saying that all my education has achieved is the destruction of my family" (Kapur 99). Here destruction of family implies the destruction of family tradition in which Kasturi has been conditioned, and whose values she has internalized and considered as standards. In this regard, professor's words are very insightful:

> If, as sometimes happens, our education leads us to question some of the value systems by which we live, that is not to say that we are destroying tradition. The tradition that refuges to entertain doubt, or remains impervious to new thoughts and ideas, becomes a prison rather than a sustaining life force. Even the smallest one of us has a social function, but that function is not to follow blindly beliefs that may not be valid. (Kapur 102)

The man-woman relationship as portrayed by Manju Kapur in this novel is equally significant in relation to the mother-daughter relationships as it contributes, directly or indirectly, to the understanding of their diversified facets. This Man-woman relationship has been presented principally by Harish Chandra and Virmati. Neglected by the mother, Virmati, like Saru, begins to find faults with herself and starts blaming herself for the disgrace to the family. Here, it is Harish, the professor, who with his progressive outlook casts an intellectual influence on Virmati and makes her see the reality in the spotlight of reason. He firmly tells her, "We are being murderers towards ourselves if we do not develop our intellect" (Kapur 103). But Virmati is convinced that she is responsible for the pain and agony her family suffering. In such situation when Virmati cannot view the things in their appropriate measure, Harish guides her by making her confront the social reality. He asserts, "Who is responsible for this state of affairs? Society, which deems that their sons should be educated, but not their daughter. Society that decides that children- babies really- should be married at the ages of two and three as we were. As a result, both of us needlessly suffer for no fault of ours" (Kapur 103). Consequently, in her relationship with her mother, Virmati becomes more adamant, determined and rigid in her decision not to marry. Finally, her family plans to send her to Lahore. Virmati is, however, sent to Lahore not merely to educate her further, but because, "Mati says at least I wouldn't be at home to remind her of the eternal disgrace I am to everybody" (Kapur 108). And Virmati leaves for Lahore to do her BT. With a heavy heart, contemplating on her situation, she ruminates: "There are families who want a career for their daughters. Nobody wanted anything for me except a husband" (Kapur 110).

Kasturi, however, cannot leave Virmati all by herself, so she herself accompanies her to Lahore. She still feels responsible for her daughter; and for that reason makes one last attempt to make her daughter see reason. She says, "If you cannot consider your duty to us, at least

consider yourself. There is a time in the cycle of life for everything. If you wilfully ignore it like this, what will happen to you? A woman without her own home and family is a woman without moorings" (Kapur 111). But these emotional words from Kasturi cannot change the decision of her daughter who is determined to be free from all social restrictions, family boundaries and her mother's dominance. There is so much pain and hatred in Kasturi's heart caused by her daughter's betrayal which she reveals to Shakuntala, "the girl was so stubborn and independent, no matter what they did for her, she wasn't grateful" (Kapur 113). But only this pain and hatred do not characterize their relationship at this stage. Notwithstanding, the mother in Kasturi cannot help pitying her daughter, "My poor girl, for this she wouldn't marry. For living in a solitary, poky little room in a strange city, for eating hostel food, for the loneliness of single life" (Kapur 115).

Now Virmati feels a vacuum within her, where only desert of loneliness reigns supreme without any stream of love flowing there. All her emotional ties with her mother have already been broken. Now there persists merely the blood relation between them. Virmati, such an isolated self, is left more vulnerable to the outside world represented by the professor. It gives him an opportunity to take the advantage of Virmati's situation; and he begins to pay frequent visits to her in Lahore. At the initial stage, Virmati keeps herself aloof from his debilitating influence, contemplating on her parents' statement about him, "A man who is already married and a traitor to his wife can never give happiness to any woman. He is a worldly person caught in his own desires. Nothing solid" (Kapur 93). But later, she succumbs to his tempting ventures. She finds the desired love in the professor's arms and longs for his presence at every moment. Consequently, Virmati gets involved in a useless love affair and an unwed pregnancy. She has to undergo an abortion. It is, then, that she realizes the vacuum existing in their relationship. Indu Swami observes: "She does not know that love and autonomy cannot coexist. Love makes one vulnerable and vulnerability does not lead to autonomy" (69).

In her relationship with Swarna Lata, her roommate in Lahore, Virmati again relives her relationship with her mother. Just like Virmati, Swarna too feels alienated from her mother. She tells Virmati, "It's only because of my father that I am here. My mother wanted me to marry. She said I had done my BA and that was enough. Where was all this study going to

end?" (Kapur 117). Swarna's resolution to do something valuable without merely getting married helps Virmati to justify her decision to study further against her mother's constant complaints. In Swarna's company Virmati is exposed to the social and political milieu of the time. Swarna tells her in clear terms, "Marriage is not the only thing in life, Viru. The war- the satyagraha movement- because of these things, women are coming out of their homes. Taking jobs, fighting, going to jail. Wake up from your stale dream" (Kapur 151). At this stage, Virmati is completely under the spell of Swarna, and her life is taking a new turn. Under her influence Virmati thinks, "This is the life I should be involved in. Not useless love and a doubtful marriage" (Kapur 134). But a typical product of her mother's patriarchal conditioning, Virmati lacks self- confidence. She is not capable enough to share her feelings with other people. It is because she is never allowed by her mother to speak for herself. "In a dim, obscure way, Virmati longed for that open- hearted conversation between friends that relieved the mind, and strengthened faith in oneself, but she had always found it difficult to articulate her feelings" (Kapur 141).

Virmati gets the opportunity to work as principal in the Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya at Nahan. This job offers security and stability in her life, but she still feels isolated from the world of love and care. A daughter is an extension of her mother's personality, and thus cannot completely escape from her roots. Virmati too cannot get rid off from her mother's memories. "Virmati shut her eyes and breathed deeply, and thought, Mati was right, I cannot escape punishment for what I have done" (Kapur 170). A sense of guilt begins to prick her conscience. The professor too cannot remain detached from her for a long time, and he comes back in her life. "He came to be the spectre that lay between her and her life as principal, so that she too began to look upon her stay there as a period of waiting rather than the beginning of a career" (Kapur 184). Unfortunately, one day she was detected with the professor and has to lose the job forever. She has made up her mind to go to Shantineketan to study further, for she cannot face her mother again after causing another disgrace to her family. Suddenly, she meets the professor in her way to Shantineketan and they are got married.

However, by becoming the second wife of the professor, Virmati completely breaks away from her mother and family. "She promised herself a blissful marriage; after all, they had gone through so much to be together. Her husband would be everything to her. This was the

way it should be, and she was pleased to finally detect a recognizable pattern in her life" (Kapur 207). But this marriage proves fortunate neither for Virmati nor for her family. She has to live a life of a stranger in her husband's home. Ganga, first wife of the professor, and her mother-in-law treat Virmati as a stranger and untouchable. She is not allowed to enter into the kitchen or touch anything. She cannot talk or play with any of the children. "He smiled at her lovingly and left, leaving her to pass a day alone in a place where her pariah status was announced with every averted look" (Kapur 215). Thus neglected by her in-laws' family, Virmati once goes to visit her mother at her parental home. But she receives nothing except insult and hatred, what else to expect for. Her mother retorts:

> Get out of here! Why bother to come now? . . . It would have been better if you had drowned in the canal than live to disgrace us like this! . . . You've destroyed our family, you *badmash*, you *randi*! You've blackened our face everywhere! For this I gave you birth? Because of you there is shame on your family, shame on me, shame on Bade Pitaji! But what do you care, brazen that you are! (Kapur 220-21)

Thus, the last tie of her relationship with her mother is also broken by her marriage to the professor. Virmati's own life becomes difficult for her to live in any meaningful way. Now she belongs neither to her parental home nor to her in-laws', lingering somewhere in the deep recesses of her mind. "That was how far she had come from her family, how much they hated her. She was not to be invited for her own brother's wedding, when the furthest, most removed relative would be pressed to come" (Kapur 225).

Neglected in her in-law's house, Virmati receives a marginalized place in her own family. To add more to her miseries, she receives the news of her father's death caused by the partition riots. But Kasturi's hatred for her does not spare Virmati even at this critical moment. As Saru's mother, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, blames her innocent daughter for her brother's death; similarly Kasturi unjustifiably charges her daughter, Virmati, for her father's accidental death. "Because of you he died. Otherwise is this the age to go?" (Kapur 239), says Kasturi, "Would your pitaji have gone if he didn't have to live with the disgrace his daughter caused him?" (240). Witnessing such an inhuman behavior of her mother towards herself, Virmati is left deserted. These pricking questions of her mother stir the conscience of Virmati. She begins to consider herself as an isolated being that is unwanted

both in her parental home and in her in-laws' abode. The next day, her grandfather too expires, and this leaves her completely broken. "Her father had died without forgiving her, and now her grandfather too. Not one of her family cared for how she felt" (Kapur 240). She does not attend any of the rituals which are performed after her grandfather's passing away. After that, she hardly speaks even to her husband, the professor.

Once Virmati conceives and things change in her in-laws family, if not completely at least in small ways. The behavior of Kishori Devi, Virmati's mother-in-law, is radically transformed. She substitutes "Virmati's morning cup of tea with a glass of hot milk" (Kapur 242), and Virmati becomes the focal point of her attention. Now she offers Virmati to sleep with her and chants every night some Sanskrit slokas to her. But this period of care and attention does not last long, for she unfortunately has a miscarriage. And this results in a great humiliation. "It had been over a year since their marriage and all that had made Virmati so dear to him seemed to have vanished completely" (Kapur 247). Again further study is thought to be the only refuge from the distress Virmati is suffering. But the resolution of Virmati's further studies causes great bitterness in the family. It is because the family has limited resources and to spend money on the education of a married woman is not considered intelligible. Finally, an MA in Philosophy is decided for Virmati.

Now Virmati's staying separate from her husband in Lahore further complicates her relationship with her mother. Virmati never contemplates how her mother would have felt when she left her mother alone and ignored her values and concerns. Once her father had commented, "After she had been educated, she had gone her own way, changed from the caring, responsible girl she had always been, to a stranger, deaf to reason, threats or pleading" (Kapur 235-36). But Virmati alone is not responsible for this complexity in her relationship with her mother. Kritika Tiwari points out:

> Most problems with the mother daughter relationship start with a breakdown in communication. Sometimes, the daughter is headstrong and won't listen to her mother's sage advice. Other times, the mother is a little bit too controlling and won't give the daughter room to breathe. More often than not, there is a little bit of both aspects going wrong when mother daughter relationships break down.

When, in Ida's memory, Virmati is in Lahore doing MA in Philosophy, the partition riots force Ganga, with family, to shift to Kanpur. Virmati gets the chance to come back to her own home and live with her husband. One day they are informed that their neighbourhood is going to be attacked. "The attack proved to have been a rumour, but it did serve one purpose. Virmati's mother sent for her. There she gives birth to a daughter named Ida. The times demanded from Kasturi that she carry resentment no further" (Kapur 274). Thus a kind of reconciliation, though not an apparent one, takes place between the mother and daughter. As it is said, "Often, mother and daughter relationships are most strengthened when things get tough. No matter how often families fight, they tend to stick up for each other when situations go wrong" (Tiwari).

"Our inheritance from our mothers, then, is not of property . . . But instead, it is a longing for becoming, for a creation of ourselves, and an entitlement to discover, to recreate what surrounds us" (Bannerji 186). This is true in the case of Ida, the narrator, who attempts to reconstruct the history of her mother and thus seeks to discover identity for herself. Ida does not want to be like her mother because she cannot identify herself with her. An isolated being as she is, Ida, however, has only her mother to look for her identity. "The detachment enables her to start a journey that takes her two generations back (her mother's and grandmother's) and to build a tale, never told by Virmati herself, essential to give a sense of her life and define her identity" (Bruschi 235). Ida wistfully compares her own experiences with the experiences of her mother in order to recreate her identity.

Since childhood, Ida has remained difficult daughter for her mother, as Virmati was for Kasturi. Moreover, in trying not to be like her mother, and to portray herself as the sheer opposite of her mother, Ida confirms her inheritance. She herself says, "She couldn't have, because when I grew up I was very careful to tailor my needs to what I know I could get. That is my female inheritance. That is what she tried to give me. Adjust, compromise, adapt" (Kapur 256). After reconstructing her mother's past, Ida realizes that Virmati too had protested against her mother, much like herself. "Yet travelling backwards in time complicates the figure of Virmati, which gains depth as Ida reads her life through her own experiences and, little by little, finds her own sensations reflected in her mother's; when she learns about Virmati's rebellion against Kasturi" (Bruschi 250). Ida can relate herself to the

image of her mother that she has captured through her memory and imagination. She can feel the pain that her mother had to undergo while aborting a child. "I knew mother, what it was like to have an abortion. Prabhakar had insisted I have one" (Kapur 156). After knowing about her mother's marginalized position in the in-laws' house, Ida cannot help relate it with her own married life. She painfully addresses her dead mother:

> Now I have nothing. Mother, I never told you this, because you thought Prabhakar was so wonderful, and I was glad that in the choice of my husband I had pleased you. Why should I burden you with my heartaches when you had enough of your own? You believed too strongly in the convention that a mother has no place in a daughter's home to stay with me, so you never really got to see the dynamics of our relationship close at hand. (Kapur 156-57)

As Virmari kept her life a secret to her daughter, similarly Ida never shares her tensions and worries with her mother. Ida concludes about her mother, "She was, after all, a woman who had defied her own family for many years" (Kapur 256).

There are mothers who use guilt and emotional blackmail to keep their daughters in subordinate status and to make the daughters do their bidding. These mothers reason that since they gave birth to their daughters and made the prerequisite sacrifices for them, their daughters should be grateful and be glad to do whatever mother wants. This is because the mother represents patriarchy and expects from the daughter to conform to the norms and values of this system. These values are transferred from the mothers to their daughters, generation after generation. When the daughter, Virmati, who was difficult for her mother to handle, herself becomes the mother of a daughter, then she realizes the meaning of being a mother. She imposes the same restrictions over her daughter, Ida, which were once imposed upon her by her own mother, Kasturi. Ida states candidly: "My mother tightened her reins on me as I grew older, she said it was for my own good. As a result, I am constantly looking for escape routes" (Kapur 279). The daughter who first felt alienated from her mother, now, by reconstructing the past of her mother, arrives at a better understanding. Isabella Bruschi observes:

> Ida's search in the past allows her to come to terms with the haunting memory of her mother. She realizes Virmati has been, like her, a difficult daughter, who has tried to challenge patriarchy, despite her failures; the distance between the two of them is reduced by the many experiences Ida discovers they have in common. (252)

The transformation of a protesting daughter, Virmati, into a submissive mother makes the whole matter clear for Ida in particular and for readers in general; that is, mothers are not wrong in exercising certain control over their daughters. In patriarchy, it is their attempt to keep their daughters safe. To put it differently, by imposing certain restrictions over their daughters, mothers show their concern for the safety of their daughters. At the end of the book, understanding takes place between Ida and her mother. She declares: "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 any more" (Kapur 280).

Manju Kapur's novel, *Difficult Daughters*, thus touches various dimensions of mother-daughter relationship. Initially, the daughter, belonging to the same sex, identifies herself with the mother. "Women as children are able to identify with their mothers quite strongly" (Panja 61). Then a stage comes when in her attempt to assert her identity, the daughter breaks away from the mother and feels alienated. However, when the same daughter, after being an experienced self, looks back at the past of her mother, she realizes what it is to be a mother in a patriarchal society. In this way, again an identification and understanding takes place between the daughter and the mother. In this regard, Asha Choubey's observation is worth quoting:

> As a child she [Virmati] keeps craving for a little understanding from her mother but with the passing of time she learns to accept the situation as it is. This mother-daughter relationship marches from identification to alienation. Years after Ida – the daughter of Virmati – relives her relation with her mother, marching from alienation to identification. (110)

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# Chapter – 4

## Mother-Daughter Relationships in *Fasting, Feasting*

The novel seems to be based, as the very title suggests, on the binary opposition, fasting and feasting, which dominate the life of the modern men and women in all sections, groups and societies world over. This dichotomy works in the lives of proletariat and capitalist, servant and master, poor and rich, and above all woman and man. The title itself is ironical, putting the oppressed one before the oppressor. But Anita Desai has invested something very new and peculiar in this novel; that is, how this dichotomy works between female-female relationships. Thus, primarily the story of human hungers, *Fasting, Feasting*, merits appreciation from the feminist point of view. Critics like Asha Choubey and Pamela Oliver have made a profound attempt to expose the implicit injustice and strategies of female subjugation in the patriarchal society. The issue of gender-discrimination is raised and analyzed by critics like Amar Nath Prasad and Usha Rani. Thematic studies have also been carried out by critics like T. Ravichandran. However, the novel has been interpreted at psychological level too by such critics as Meenakshi Raman and Sushila Rathore. The studies in the realm of stylistic and syntactic structure have been conducted by critics like M. Q. Khan.

However, Anita Desai's novel, *Fasting, Feasting*, published in 1999, seems to have been influenced by the radical phase of feminist movement. Radical feminists essentially demand complete emancipation from the shackles of oppressive patriarchal stereotypes. The basic problem faced by such feminists is how to challenge and subvert the norms of patriarchy while, simultaneously, being parts of the same system itself. "To evade this dilemma, Helena Cixous posits the existence of an incipient 'feminine writing' (ecriture feminine) which has its source in the mother, in the stage of the mother-child relation before the child acquires the male-centred verbal language" (Abrams 97). Anita Desai is, undoubtedly, one among such radical writers who tend to challenge the stereotypes of motherhood. Therefore, a few critics like Asha Choubey and Aparna Goswami and Bhasker Jyoti Goswami have focused their study on this aspect of *Fasting, Feasting*. These critics have tried, with genteel enthusiasm, to decipher the ground reality of mother-daughter relationships. Choubey arrives at the conclusion that when daughter does not receive the desired love and affection, and when

there is a dearth of understanding between mother and daughter, it leads to alienation and depression in the psyche of the girl child. This renders the daughter vulnerable to the pressures of the world outside. On the other hand, Aparna Goswami and Bhaskar Jyoti Goswami, in their combined paper, approach mother-daughter relationship from a psychological point of view. They consider that a reluctant approach to motherhood, by mothers, is a way of asserting themselves. Thus these critics have something radically different to present; that is, maternal apathy, indifference and alienation are not negative but instead positive attempts on the part of mothers to get rid of their motherhood, in which they have been chained. But it seems as if these critics have ignored the fact that such attempts by the mother, however, bring drastic, and more often destructive, changes in the personality of the daughter. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine how the mother's negation of her motherhood poses threat to the growth and development of the child, especially of daughter, and simultaneously focusing on the oscillation occurring in the relationships of mother and daughter in Anita Desai's novel in question.

Anita Desai's novel, *Fasting, Feasting,* is not merely a book about woman and her diversified roles as mother, daughter and wife; but it also "recounts human relationships in the language not only of fasting and feasting but of greed, craving, taboo, denial and disgust" (Dasgupta viii). Delineating the human hungers, as its title suggests, the novel is about the starving daughters and prospering mothers who are no more concerned with their motherly duties as made necessary by patriarchy. Though remaining within the threshold of male dominated society, the mother here retains something of her own, a niche for her individual being, divorced from the duties of a traditional mother. In addition to this, "the novel gives an excruciating account of how society can seize control of individuals – especially women – through such practices as eating, and remove them from everything they intended to be" (Dasgupta viii). It shows that Desai's vision is quite different from that of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur. Here the mother adapts the traditions and values of patriarchy for creating a haven for herself. Aparna and Bhaskar Jyoti Goswami comment, "Desai's female characters can often be seen as librated even from the emotional responsibility of motherhood. They are conceived of as primal creatures, busy in pursuing their own motivations, desires and thriving for the fulfillment of their selves" (192). She does not bother, in the way of a traditional woman, for children and family, turning her face from the responsibilities of a mother. By

leaving her children devoid of maternal care and love, she keeps on enjoying her life with her male counterpart. But the question arises if woman, in the wake of feminist movement, abandons her domestic sphere completely, what would become of her children? How can freedom be earned at the cost of negating motherhood? The reputed American public thinker Camille Paglie remarks, "Woman's current advance in society is not a voyage from myth to truth but from myth to new myth . . . An awful lot is being swept under the rug, the awe and terror that is our lot" (qtd. in Pandy 208). Thus it seems as if in the light of the new millennium, the caring eye of the mother has lost its eyesight, leaving the children in the eternal darkness of abandonment where insanity awaits them. Individual freedom won at the cost of assassinating one's own children's emotions is worthless. There must be a kind of harmony, some sort of balance between a woman's two distinct roles- of a mother and of an individual. Otherwise what being sown are mere dry bones of neglect, rejection and hatred; it can be imagined what would sprout from them.

The novel, *Fasting, Feasting,* has been divided into two segments, dealing with two diverse cultures – Indian and American. The first part tells Uma's story in relation to her mother with the backdrop of her relationships with her sister, Aruna, brother, Arun, and her father. Desai has portrayed these relationships so intricately that it seems almost impossible to understand mother-daughter relationship without approaching them simultaneously. Much like Jane Austen, Anita Desai primarily deals with two or three families as forming the plot of her present novel. Uma's family consists of her parents and their two daughters, one being Uma herself. The parents have merged into each other so intensely that now it appears quite difficult to conceive them as separate beings. "MamandPapa. MamaPapa. PapaMama. It was hard to believe they had ever had separate existences, that they had been separate entities and not MamaPapa in one breath" (Desai 5). The novelist has not felt the need to give them separate names; instead, they are addressed as MamaPapa in the same breath.

In his review of the novel, Andrew Robinson comments, "In Papa and Mama, the Indian parents, she [Anita Desai] creates two monsters of almost Gothic proportions, locked into inseparable marital disharmony, determined to inflict on their two daughters and only son every ounce of the prejudices and disappointments of their own lives, as a respectable barrister and his wife in an undistinguished town (39). Uma's father had studied under the

streetlight and seems to be infatuated with education; whereas her mother is a housewife who has absorbed patriarchal values to such an extent that she cannot even like to think beyond patriarchal horizon. Herself a victim of gender discrimination, she remembers, "In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought in the market, like sweets or nuts, it was given to the boys in the family" (Desai 5). Thus conditioned by the gender biased attitude of the parents, Uma's mother embodies all the feminine traits expected from a girl in a patriarchal society. Pramod K. Nayar aptly observes:

> The woman is thus "naturalised" with the qualities that are granted her. She is never able to be other than this image given her. Male versions of femininity are deemed as the definitive versions – there is no female truth except what the *male construes it to be*. This is, unfortunately, deeply assimilated into/by the woman too. (88)

Uma's mother is also a socially constructed self, a product of patriarchal ideology. Desai describes, ". . . her eyes gleamed with mischief as she tossed back her head and laughed apparently without any thought of propriety. She clasped the cards to her chest and fluttered her lashes coquettishly" (7). But Uma's mother lives a double or split existence; she lives both as an individual and a traditional wife.

At the initial stage "there is seen a special bond between the mother and the two girls, all of them being the victims of Papa" (Choubey, Mothers 111). But later the mother becomes one with her husband and serving him remains the sole aim of her life. The mother is completely overtaken by patriarchy represented by the father. It is because:

> . . . his thoughts were one with hers. Their opinion differed so rarely that if Mama refused to let Aruna wear a pearl necklace to the matinee at the Regal cinema or Papa decided Uma could not take music lessons after school, there was no point in appealing to the other parent for a different verdict: none was expected, or given. (Desai 14)

Therefore, the daughters of the family, both Uma and Aruna, receive only rejection from their parents. The mother either remains busy with her husband on the swing in the varanda or in going for kitty parties and playing cards with her female friends. The daughters are treated as nuisance by their mother. "She swatted at her daughters as if they were a pair of troublesome

flies . . . her daughters trailing after her, and by the time she arrived at the varanda, her manner had become the familiar one of guarded, restraint, censure and a tired decorum" (Desai 7). In doing her duty to serve her husband, Uma's mother does not pay any heed to her daughters and they are left neglected, bereft of any care and affection. "Mama would sit herself down on the varanda swing, alone, to wait for him, keeping a cursory eye on the little girls as they played in the dry patch of grass . . . She intervened irritably when they quarreled too loudly" (Desai 8).

Alva Mrydal and Viola Klein observe:

> 'Children First' is the motto writ large over all discussions of the merits and demerits of married women. . . . Our children are our stake in the future; hence their well-being is of vital concern to society as well as to us personally. And as we have brought them into this world, it is our responsibility to make them, as best we can, fit to live in it happily and successfully. (116)

But these caring words sound true only in regard to a son. In patriarchy, the upbringing of a daughter remains a half-hearted affair to the parents. Uma's parents' irresponsible behavior towards their daughters leaves the girls bewildered. "The girls had learnt not to expect divergences and disagreements, and these occurred so rarely that they might not have recognized them when they did" (Desai 14). One day Uma's mother is found to be pregnant. As a result of an aspiring father, the pregnancy is not terminated and a son is born in the family. In patriarchal system, a mother is made to feel blessed by giving birth to a male heir. Hence the expressions of Uma's mother also change, "They were acutely aware of the wonder of it. Mama's face, still tense from the difficult delivery, began to relax and broaden into long-suffering pride" (Desai 16-17).

Alladi Uma comments, "A daughter is confident about a mother's love. She knows she is not a second class member of the family; she is no supplement. She is a necessity in her mother's life. At times her mother depends on her. It is an interdependence and a reciprocity we cannot miss" (73). But there is no such interdependence and reciprocity in Uma's relationship with her mother. A hindrance in her daughter's life, Uma's mother leaves no room for her daughter to prosper. Asha Choubey observes, "Desai as a true humanist puts the

blame not only on men who are suffering with the complex of male-superiority but also on women who oppress their own kind. It is not only the male-chauvinist that acts as the antagonist force but also apathetic female does more harm in terms of the loss of woman-soul" (Frailty 126). Uma is reduced to the status of a domestic servant. Her mother's sole aim is to please her husband and she uses Uma to carry it out. Uma is always asked to tell the cook to make this or that for Papa or to take care of her younger brother, Arun. Her mother has risen in status after becoming the mother of a son:

> More than ever now, she was Papa's helpmeet, his consort. He had not only made her his wife, he had made her the mother of his son. What honour, what status. Mama's chin lifted a little into the air, she looked around her to make sure everyone saw and noticed. She might have been wearing a medal. (Desai 31)

Therefore, all the love and care is showered on the son and the daughters never even receive their share of attention and, in addition, are treated merely as an obligation by the parents. Uma herself notices, "how Mama and Papa looked upon Arun with an identical expression: a kind of nervous, questioning, somewhat doubtful but determined pride. He was their son, surely an object of pride" (Desai 31).

Such a gender-based attitude on the part of parents seems somehow unnatural but what Amar Nath Prasad remarks is quite relevant, "Most probably, the reason of their frustration and step-motherly treatment can be sought in the psychology of the parents- such parents who are more interested in a boy child than in a girl child" (40). However like Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Uma too is burdened with the responsibility of her kid brother even before she can enjoy her own childhood. The eldest sister is made to act as a surrogate mother to her younger brother. The author candidly states, "When Mama came home, weak, exhausted and short-tempered, she tried to teach Uma the correct way of folding nappies, of preparing watered milk, of rocking the screaming infant to sleep when he was covered with prickly heat as with a burn" (Desai 18). Thus, Uma's mother begins to shape her daughter in the traditions of patriarchal society where a girl is moulded in the role of a housewife and a domestic servant. Moreover herself not much educated, Uma's mother pays no attention to her daughter's education. Like Kasturi, Virmati's mother in *Difficult Daughters*, she does not

value her daughter's academic career. Once she snaps, "We are not sending you back to school, Uma. You are staying at home to help with Arun" (Desai 18).

Like Virmati and Saru, Uma wants to be educated, but unlike them fails miserably in her attempts. Uma remains, like Virmati, engaged in household chores which consume most of her valuable time. No tuition classes are arranged by her parents. As a result, Uma fails in her exams miserably. The novelist states, ". . . in spite of her raging enthusiasm, she was an abject scholar. . . . There was not a thing Uma put her hand to that did not turn to failure" (21). The issue of education has usually remained a battleground for both mothers and daughters to fight. The influence of education generally results in developing questioning attitude in the daughter. But the mother never likes to be questioned by the creature of her own blood. Uma's mother is an insensitive, self-centered mother with myopic view and vision. She tries to convince Uma, "You know you failed your exams again. You're not being moved up. What's the use of going back to school? Stay at home and look after your baby brother" (Desai 22). Uma's mother fails to be a caring and trusted mother to her children. Aparna and Bhaskar Jyoti Goswami observe, "As far as Uma is concerned, she interferes unduly and negatively by stopping her education after two continuous failures and with cruel selfishness, makes her an ayah to her younger brother, convincing her that it will help her in gaining experience of household duties" (199).

Uma seems to be a mere shadow of her parents, not an individual self. "Reduced thus to a baby-sitter at her earlier days and an unpaid servant for her self-centred parents for the rest of her life, Uma finds no escape from her entrapment" (Ravichandran 83). However school is a kind of escape for Uma from her mother's dominance and where she can feel more safe, secure and a mistress of her own. Even weekends are difficult for her to pass at home. The novelist remarks:

> There were the wretched weekends when she was plucked back into the trivialities of her home, which seemed a denial, a negation of life as it ought to be, somber and splendid, and then the endless summer vacation when the heat reduced even that pointless existence to further vacuity. (Desai 21)

Once Uma takes to the path of rebellion and escapes in the afternoon from the house to school to meet Mother Agnes, so that she can be admitted again in the school. But this attempt of Uma too results in failure. Uma's mother becomes infuriated at such an independent step of her daughter. She retorts, "See what these nuns do . . . What ideas they fill in the girls' heads! I always said don't send them to a convent school. Keep them at home, I said- but who listened? And now- !" (Desai 29). Such a reaction of her mother renders Uma submissive and docile. However, the plight of Uma raises a significant question in the reader's mind, that is, in patriarchy the same miserable fate awaits the daughter, no matter she is rebellious or submissive. Here Uma presents a direct contrast to Virmati and Saru. Both these girls suffer in their life because they rebel against patriarchy represented by their mothers. But Uma also is a victim of her mother's wrath despite being submissive. It suggests that tension in mother and daughter relationship arises not only because of daughter's rebellious nature but also due to mother's dominating attitude. Asha Choubey comments:

> Mothers are such strong influences in the lives of their daughters that they have the power to make or mar their daughter's personality. In a patriarchal world, however mothers instead of protecting the interests of their daughters become instrumental in torturing them. (Mothers 111)

Like Virmati, Uma's school education is curtailed and she is further trained in the duties of a housewife. Uma's mother wants her daughter to accept marriage as her career instead of education. She asks:

> 'What is the use of going back to school if you keep failing, Uma? . . . You will be happier at home. You won't need to do any lessons. You are a big girl now. We are trying to arrange a marriage for you. Not now,' she added, seeing the panic on Uma's face. 'But soon. Till then, you can help me look after Arun. And learn to run the house.' (Desai 22)

She has to serve her father bananas, oranges, apples and lemonade at the right time and with appropriate gestures on her mother's behalf. She is, thus, made to feel proud at trivialities. Her mother comments, "Girls have to learn these things too, you know . . . she showed Uma how to pour a little oil on her fingertips and then massage it into the baby's limbs" (Desai 28-

29). Consequently, Uma loses interest in the world around her. This state of Uma reminds us of Laura, the daughter in Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Managerie*. Like Uma, Laura leads a fragile existence. So she cannot face the world of harsh reality and finds escape in her collection of glass animals as Uma usually finds escape in her Christmas cards and bangle collection.

Uma's only comfort lies in the company of her Mira-masi and her cousin, Ramu. But both of them are unwelcomed guests in MamaPapa's home and Uma's mother considers them as bad influences on her daughter. Mira-masi is a widow who has a fascination for pilgrimages and keeps on visiting shrines, temples and distant Asharms throughout the year. "Ever since her widowhood, she had taken up religion as her vocation. Her day was ruled by rituals, from the moment she woke to make her salutations to the sun, through her ritual bath and morning prayers, to the preparation of her widow's single and vegetarian meal of the day, and through the evening ceremonies at the temples she visited" (Desai 39). Uma's relationship with Mira-masi is somewhat spiritual in essence. She listens from her ancient myths of Hinduism and tales of various gods and goddesses. Such knowledge of religion and spirituality proves a kind of moral support for Uma. She receives love and care from her Mira-masi which is always denied by her mother. This helps Uma to develop again a taste for life that has been lost somewhere. The influence of Mira-masi thus affects Uma's psyche deeply. "Then Uma, with her ears and even her fingertips tingling, felt that here was someone who could pierce through the dreary outer world to an inner world, tantalizing in its colour and romance. If only it could replace this, Uma thought hungrily" (Desai 40).

However, Uma's relationship with her cousin, Ramu, is totally different from the one with Mira-masi. To Uma, her Mira-masi represents the world of spirituality and divinity; whereas Ramu represents the material world with an urge for pleasure. Whenever he visits Uma's home, it fills her heart with joy. Once he takes Uma for dinner in some restaurant despite her parent's constant refusal. He makes Uma drink and dance; and she has one of the best times with him. Uma's mother cannot tolerate such an influence on her daughter. "'Quiet you hussy! Not another word from you, you idiot child!' Mama's face glints like a knife in the dark, growing narrower and fiercer as it comes closer. 'You, you disgrace to the family-nothing but disgrace, ever!'" (Desai 53). Such behaviour of Uma's mother lacks sensitivity,

understanding and even interest in Uma. Simone de Beauvoir rightly comments on women like her:

> She systematically takes a dislike to the friends among whom her daughter seeks help against family oppression and who 'work on her feelings'; she criticizes them, forbids her daughter to see them too often or even to be with them at all, on the pretext that they 'have had a bad influence' on her. Any influence that is not hers is bad, but she feels a special animosity towards women of her own age – teachers, mothers of companions – with whom the little girl becomes affectionate; such feelings, she says, are ridiculous or morbid. (535)

Her mother does not approve Uma visiting even their neighbours like Mrs. O'Henry and Mrs. Joshi.

In patriarchy, instead of education, it is marriage which is offered to girls as a career. Since their childhood, girls are conditioned to consider marriage as their ultimate destiny. When nothing works for Uma, she is made to plunge into marriage. "It was as if their mothers had been tending them, in their flowerpots, for just this moment when their cheeks would fill out and their lips take on a glisten and all the giggles and whispers would arrive at that one decision – *marriage*" (Desai 67). Now Papa is so desperate that he himself sends letters to all their relatives asking for marriage proposals for Uma. He writes, "Uma is still young but may be considered of marriageable age and we see no reason to continue her studies beyond class eight" (Desai 75). Although Uma was withdrawn from school before she could reach class eight. Proposals arrive and Uma is shown the snaps of eligible bachelors as a sign of family's progressive outlook. Three desperate attempts are made to get Uma married but unfortunately all of them end in fiasco. The first suitor likes Aruna rather than the elder daughter of the family. Second suitor's family refuges to perform marriage after acquiring a pre-marital dowry from Uma's family. In a conversation with Uma's mother, Mrs. Joshi, their neighbour, comments:

> 'Yes, that is why the Goyals are able to do such things, because of parents being in too much of a hurry. If parents will not take the time to make proper enquiries, what

terrible fates their daughters may have! Be grateful that Uma was not married into a family that could have burnt her to death in order to procure another dowry!' (Desai 84)

Even after such warnings, no serious inquiries are made about the third suitor and a hasty marriage is offered. "Since it was clear Uma was not going to receive any other offer no matter what a good job the photographer had done with his unpromising material, Mama and Papa decided to proceed with the negotiations" (Desai 89). It seems as if Uma is a burden for her parents to be released as soon as possible. And finally when Uma gets married, her husband is found to be already married, having a wife and four children. She is brought back to her parental home where nobody is concerned about her humiliation and her ruin. Her parents merely curse the moment of marriage and moan over the dowry and the wedding expenses. After that Uma remains an outcast from the world of marriage, the world that matters above all in patriarchy. "Having cost her parents two dowries, without a marriage to show in return, Uma was considered ill-fated by all and no more attempts were made to marry her off" (Desai 98).

Uma's mother thinks that it was her daughter's bad looks and uneducated status that never enabled her to find a suitable husband. Uma recollects, "How Mama had always envied Lila Aunty for having a daughter like Anamika, a model of perfection like Anamika. No, that was not for her, she sighed" (Desai 77). Uma's feelings about Anamika have a very strong influence on her relationship with her mother. Uma sometimes try to justify her mother's rudeness towards herself by observing the beauty and intelligence of Anamika that she herself unfortunately lacks. Uma thinks that Anamika deserves Lila aunty's love and care because she is a very intelligent and laborious student. But this is not true in a patriarchal society where every girl, educated or uneducated, is expected to be a good housewife and an obedient domestic servant. Uma's cousin Anamika presents a sharp contrast to Uma in that she is more pretty and educated than her. "She was simply lovely as a flower is lovely, soft, petal-skinned, bumblebee-eyed, pink-lipped, always on the verge of bubbling dove-like laughter, loving smiles, and with a good nature like a radiance about her. Wherever she was, there was peace, contentment, well-being" (Desai 68). She wins a scholarship to Oxford. "To Oxford, where only the most favoured and privileged sons could ever hope to go! Naturally her parents would not countenance her actually going abroad to study – just when she was of

an age to marry . . .” (Desai 69). They look upon the letter of acceptance as a trump card which is used to search a husband for her. Anamika never objects or questions her parents’ decision. She is married to a man much older than her and who is more conscious of his superiority. “Anamika had been beaten, Anamika was beaten regularly by her mother-in-law while her husband stood by and approved – or, at least, did not object” (Desai 71). She has a miscarriage as a result of regular thrashing. And then one day news comes that Anamika has committed suicide.

However, Mama’s relationship with her younger daughter, Aruna, is quite different from her relationship with Uma. Like Uma, a victim of her parents’ gender-based attitude Aruna adopts the idea of ‘femininity’ whole heartedly as a survival device. She considers her mother a model for herself and tends to follow on her footprints. Nancy Chodorow points out, “A girl tends to retain elements of her preoedipal primary love and primary identification. This has been compounded through the years by reinforcement from a more conscious gender-role identification with her mother” (136). Feeling neglected in the male dominated society, Aruna escapes into the feminine universe. She learns very early the coquettish behavior of her mother. “There was already something about the way she tossed her head when she saw a man looking at her, with a sidelong look of both scorn and laughter, and the way her foot tapped and her legs changed position, that might have alerted the family to what it could expect” (Desai 80-81). Aruna adopts quickly all the feminine traits required to become a good housewife. This is just a way for Aruna to assert her individuality. She is not submissive like her sister, Uma. Instead, Aruna has a rebellious nature and she can question her mother. “By the time Aruna was fourteen she was rebelling against the blue cotton tunic and the white hair ribbons” (Desai 81). There are a few advantages that Aruna can enjoy. First she is more pretty and cute than Uma; and second, she does not have to look after Arun. That responsibility is left only for Uma to bear. “When Uma was still watching to see that Arun did not crawl off the varanda and break his neck or put knitting needles or naphthalene balls in his mouth, Aruna was already climbing into bicycle rickshaws and going off to the cinema – with girl friends from school, she said” (81). Despite her mother’s careless attitude towards her children, Aruna becomes a full grown woman with all the attributes that a girl must possess to survive in patriarchy. She has, in a way, carved out a space for herself by her feminine qualities in the complex family web. “Here was Aruna visibly ripening on the

branch, asking to be plucked: no one had to teach her how to make samosas or help her to dress for an occasion. Instinctively, she knew" (Desai 87).

Since childhood, Aruna presents a contrast to Uma both in matters of looks and education. Though conditioned by the same mother, Uma and Aruna have formed different personalities. One becomes the victim of that conditioning and can never prosper; and other takes that conditioning as a challenge and carves out a space for herself. Alladi Uma points out, "Even while a daughter may seem to be neglected by the mother, even while she questions the relationship, she cannot totally negate her mother or her influence" (74). If Uma has learnt her mother's docility and submission, Aruna has opted freedom and zest for life from her mother. Aruna uses her attractiveness as a survival device. While Mama searches energetically for a husband for Uma, families are already making enquiries about Aruna. Moreover, when after marriage Aruna comes back to her mother's home with her children, she exactly imitates her mother's behavior. Most of the time Aruna remains out of the home busy in visiting her old friends and their families as her mother remained in kitty parties and card game. She is as careless and indifferent as her mother in regard to her children. However, Uma's relationship with her sister, Aruna, does no good but intensifies the tensions between Uma and her mother. Uma usually notices her mother favouring Aruna's smartness over her own submissiveness. This further makes their relationship problematic.

Now the question arises why these three daughters – Uma, Aruna and Anamika – have different fates despite being conditioned in the same patriarchal norms and values by their mothers. It is because these daughters respond to their mothers' conditioning differently and consequently develop diverse attitudes and individualities. Uma adopts submissiveness at an early stage to derive some solace from the hazard of her neglected existence. The path of submission and docility appears to her as the only valid way out from the nudging and tirades of her mother. For Aruna her mother's strictness is a kind of challenge which she accepts and counters in her own way. She develops a predilection for her femininity and makes the family notice her adroitness in by far adopting feminine traits. As far as Anamika is concerned, her distinctiveness lies in her intelligence and astuteness. She takes to education for creating a separate space for herself in her parents' patriarchal home. She performs well in studies and earns a scholarship to Oxford. Thus, these girls have espoused three different modes of

survival as a result of their distinct individualities. Apart from this fact, it is the role of the parents that has contributed in creating distinction in the life of the daughters. Uma is offered a typical arranged marriage by her parents in which she does not have any say. The parents solely take it as their right to decide for her and ultimately, Uma has to pay severely for her submissiveness. Although in Anamika's case it is different. Her education is used as a trap by her parents to ensnare their daughter in a mismatched marriage. It is Anamika's subservient nature and conformity to her image of the ideal daughter that renders her meek even in her marital home. Consequently, she suffers silently and meets her terrible end. However, Aruna is offered an arranged cum love marriage. "As was to be expected, she took her time, showed a reluctance to decide, played choosy, but soon enough made the wisest, most expedient choice – the handsomest, the richest, the most exciting of the suitors who presented themselves" (Desai 102). Aruna is given the chance to decide for herself by the parents and this results in a successful marriage. Thus, parents' unnecessary intervention in the daughter's life is not a healthy affair in that a single wrong decision of the parents can convert the daughter's life into a hell. Parental role in a girl's life is the crucial deciding factor of what kind of life she would lead.

Alva Mrydal and Viola Klein point out:

> Although deficient understanding of the children's need at each age level may itself cause emotional and social and perhaps also intellectual underdevelopment, and although a feeling of 'rejection' occurs now and then for reasons which have to do with a mother's personality . . . the risk exists that ambitious mothers may more often cause their children to feel willfully neglected. (130)

The same happens with Uma who, a victim of her mother's indifference, can never develop a social self for herself. No understanding ever exists between Uma and her mother. Even the presence of her mother makes her feel a culprit. For her own comfort, Mama burdens Uma with the responsibility of Arun's upbringing. Uma never receives any encouragement from her mother to study and make a career for herself. Even she is made to quit her school by her mother. Education is required not merely to be eligible for job or career, but it also contributes to the mental development of the individual. As a consequence, Uma lacks independence and confidence even after being a grown up. Meenakshi Raman and Sushila

Rathore observe, "Their apathetic and rude behavior has never allowed her to become a mature person. They are responsible in making her a diffident child having no inclination towards creating a separate existence of her own and whenever she has tried to do it they have tried their best to evade it" (137). When a job is offered by Dr Dutt to Uma, the very idea of it enrages the parents. It is her mother who raises an objection on behalf of Uma's father. "Our daughter does not need to go out to work, Dr Dutt," she said, "As long as we are here to provide for her, she will never need to go to work" (Desai 146).

Her mother never allows Uma to be independent. She is turned into a mere loyal servant to her whom she does not want to lose. When the offer of job is declined, Mama asks Uma, "And so my madcap wanted to run away and leave her Mama? What will my madcap do next?" (Desai 148). If a comparison is sought between Uma and Virmati, the protagonist of *Difficult Daughters*, one finds out that Virmati suffers from loneliness and seclusion after leaving her family and home, but Uma suffers even within her family. Even a few moments of private life are not allowed to her. She can neither visit her neighbours nor can sit alone in the home. "The biased and rigid attitude of parents, papa always scowling and mama scolding leave no room for Uma to fulfill any of her desires and dreams. Even a few moments of peace and tranquility in her room are denied to her" (Rani 177). Every time her parents keep her busy in one domestic task or another. She is not even permitted to make phone calls. Once she secretly makes a call to Dr Dutt but forgets to lock the phone after use and is caught. Her father retorts, "'Costs money! Costs money!' he kept shouting long after. 'Never earned anything in her life, made me spend and spend, on the dowry and her wedding. Oh, yes, spend till I'm ruined, till I am a pauper – '" (Desai 149). This shows the hypocrisy of parents. On the one hand, they do not allow Uma to do a job outside home, and on the other curse her for not earning anything. Her mother never supports Uma to look for a career even after splitting off her marriage. She never pays any heed to the fact what would become of Uma when they would no longer be in this world. Thus, such a behavior of her parents, especially of her mother, leaves Uma a baffled child, devoid of any emotional support. Asha Choubey rightly comments on Uma's relationship with her mother, "This is one relationship wherein understanding and support are most expected but this is sadly one relationship where these ideas are lacking" (Mothers 113).

This indifference at the hands of her parents makes Uma feel insignificant and she starts losing confidence. "Parental strictness is often experienced as rejection by children. From these deprivations result many neurotic personalities, insecure, restless, dissatisfied people, both young and old" (Mrydal and Klein 130). Uma's humiliation and disgust with herself has affected her inner world to such an extent that she begins to have fainting fits. She does not have anybody to unburden her heart to. Such a pathetically isolated self, Uma has no source from where she can gain love and attention. In this context, Meenakshi Raman and Sushila Rathore point out, "All her quests and her frustrations are restricted to her thoughts without any outlet" (136). Thus these accumulated frustrations find an outlet through fits. The reader is left with a lump in his throat after viewing Uma's condition. What type of parents these are who are so unkind even to their own daughter?

The second part of the novel deals with Mrs. Patton's family and her relationship with her daughter, Melanie. The connecting link between these two families is Arun, brother of Uma, who is sent to study further in America. "The two grave psychological risks which young children normally run are those of 'rejection' and 'over-protection'" (Mrydal and Klein 130). This observation seems quite appropriate in this context. If Uma in India and Melanie in America are victims of their mother's rejection, Arun is the victim of his parents' over-protective attitude. Melanie has lost appetite to eat anything else than nuts and candy:

> She sits in the gloom of the unlit staircase, munching the nuts with a mulish obstinacy, regarding him with eyes that are slits of pink-rimmed green. Has she been crying? She looks sullen rather than tearful. It is her habitual expression. Arun reflects that he has not once seen it change. (Desai 168)

But her mother never bothers about her daughter's losing appetite. A caged bird in her husband's home, Mrs. Patton herself does not have any choice to eat. She has to eat, along with other family members, the meat that Mr. Patton cooks himself for dinner. No matter whether its India or America, in the patriarchal society a woman does not have any say even in matters of eating. Once Mrs. Patton confides in Arun, "I've always wanted to be one myself. I've always hated eating meat – oh, that red, raw stuff, the *smell* of it! I've always, always disliked it – but never could – never knew how – you know, my family wouldn't have liked it. But I've always liked vegetables best" (Desai 183). Later in the company of Arun,

Mrs. Patton has become obsessed with shopping. She is not least concerned about her daughter's health and never cares what Melanie eats and why. Arun does not see in her a real mother but just a plastic copy of the original. He states, "She smiles a bright plastic copy of a mother-smile that Arun remembers from another world and another time, the smile that is tight at the corners with pressure, the pressure to perform a role, to make him eat, make him grow, make him worth all the trouble and effort and expense" (Desai 198). Much like Uma's mother, Mrs. Patton has a very detached outlook towards her children. She is concerned only to fill the freezer with food items. "She is not involved in the lives of her own children. She is not aware of the fact that her teenage daughter, Melanie is practically starving and has developed a habit of vomiting after consuming her favourite peanuts and candies" (A. Goswami and B. J. Goswami 202-03). She is never shown to be talking with her daughter personally and in an intimate relationship. Melanie is left all by herself to manage. Once Melanie reveals her frustrations to her mother, "'I hate scrambled eggs! Why don't you ask me what I want? Why can't you make me what I *want*? What do you think we all are – garbage bags you keep stuffing and stuffing?'" (Desai 209-10).

Aparna and Bhaskar Jyoti Goswami observe, "Anita Desai, for the first time, brings it to the notice of readers that there are many more dimensions to a woman's personality than just being someone's mother, or for that matter, someone's wife, or mistress" (199). Mrs. Patton represents a modern version of motherhood and enjoys sunbathing without caring for anything else. Neglected by her mother, Melanie becomes a patient of depression. She eats only candies and keeps on vomiting all day. Desai aptly describes:

> Then Arun does see a resemblance to something he knows: a resemblance to the contorted face of an enraged sister who, failing to express her outrage against neglect, against misunderstanding, against in attention to her unique and singular being and its hungers, merely spits and froths in ineffectual protest. How strange to encounter it here, Arun thinks, where so much is given, where there is both licence and plenty. (217)

Thus daughters neglected by their mothers often become hysterical. Like Uma, Melanie does not have any outlet to relieve her frustrations. Such isolated daughters have nothing in store but only bulimia, anorexia, depression, withdrawal, compulsive behavior and hysteria.

Anita Desai, through her present novel, tends to show that excessive concerns of mothers in case of Arun and complete disinterestedness in case of Uma and Melanie leave the children completely shattered. *Fasting, Feasting* is both a plea and warning to those mothers who venture into their own individual worlds by rejecting their children's right to be loved and cared. Such negation of motherhood would render the future generations crippled.

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# Chapter – 5

# Conclusion

A close study of Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* and Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* reveals a deep insight into the plight of the woman in relation to her two major roles – mother and daughter. Interpreting daughter's place in her mother's life and mother's indelible influence on the daughter's psyche, the study has been carried out with due consideration to the fact that a need for renovation in mother-daughter ties may be underlined. The presentation of mothers and daughters in the selected novels of these renowned novelists is remarkably arresting and insightful. They have approached this relationship in a very sensitive and realistic manner. Experienced as both mothers and daughters, these writers have portrayed the engaging conflicts existing between mothers and daughters with their first-hand experience. But nowhere the subjectivity in their works has marred their visionary outlook and sensitive attitude towards both mothers and daughters. What comes out after studying intensively their novels in question is that the relationship of mother with her daughter, seemingly simple and loving, reverberates with many diversified conflicts, rising primarily from mother's domination and daughter's response to it.

Hitherto, this relationship has been considered as humming with love and care. The word 'mother' connotes love, affection, selfless devotion and all that is noble in human nature. The role of the mother has been eulogized even in ancient epics and scriptures. Mother is considered a source and fountain-head of incessant love. Motherly love has been represented in both religious and social documents in the limelight, as uncompromising and consistent. Through such representation of woman as mother, a very strong stereotype is born called motherhood. The ideology of motherhood is to show mothering as innate or natural to women by its ceaselessly glorified representations. The responsibility of mothering and its tenderness are considered as the principal defining attributes of a woman. Such types of stereotypical representations are strengthened by their recurrence in literature and carried out from generation to generation. But with the emergence of intellectual and philosophical revolutions, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, representation of

motherhood has also radically changed. Recent observations of feminist writers have questioned and challenged the socially constructed phenomenon called motherhood.

The myth of motherhood has been intensively explored and systematically dealt with by Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and Anita Desai in their novels under study. These writers have approached the phenomenon of motherhood in a very objective and scientific way. They tend to show the ground reality lying behind the idea of motherhood by both demythifying and demystifying it. Deshpande in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has presented Saru's mother as a sheer opposite of the image of a traditional mother. She is not an embodiment of devotion and sacrifice; instead, she tortures her daughter with a biased attitude. Saru, right from her childhood days, is treated as inferior to her kid brother, Dhruva. Her mother showers all her love and affection on her son, leaving her daughter starving even for a little share of attention. Similarly, in Kapur's novel, *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati's mother has been presented as an uncaring and insensible mother who never gives Virmati her share of motherly love. A child herself, Virmati is burdened by her mother with the responsibility of nurturing her younger siblings. Anita Desai too has portrayed Uma's mother in *Fasting, Feasting* with the same kind of negative colours. The mother remains busy in her own world with her husband, negating her duty to her children. Later on, even the liability of Arun's upbringing is left on the part of Uma herself. In the second part, Mrs. Patton too is no more concerned about her daughter, Melanie's life. Here the mother privileges her womanhood over her motherhood. Thus by representing such types of mother figures, these writers tend to show that there are various facets of a woman in her role of a mother.

In fact, it is the institution of patriarchy that has used mothers to perpetuate its traditions and values in the social realm. Thus, the unequal social relations between men and women are the products of patriarchal system. Such disparity caused by patriarchy gives rise to the concept of gender-discrimination. Girls are made to perceive themselves inferior to the boys since their childhood. This task of socializing daughters in the values of patriarchal social system is accorded to mothers. Such a strong influence of patriarchy on mother-daughter ties has been delineated by these writers with a cause and effect relationship. Woman is made to feel privileged in the patriarchal society only in her role of a mother. Thus she cherishes a sense of authority in the mother's role. The children become her asset and she exercises full

control over them. Saru's mother takes it her inborn right to decide for her daughter. But when Saru ignores her mother's suggestions about her career and takes to medicine, this creates a divide in their relationship. Kasturi, Virmati's mother, too wants her daughter to get married according to her mother's wish. But Virmati's aspiration to be educated prevents her to follow her mother's dictates. This becomes the central conflict in their relation. Uma is also a victim of her mother's domination. Her mother always keeps her busy in one household job after another. She is made to quit her schooling and is offered a traditional arranged marriage by her mother. Thus it is the mother's domination and a sense of authority that renders mother-daughter relation strained. This can be termed as the first conflicting stage of mother-daughter bonds.

Another significant factor which causes conflict in the relationship of mother and daughter is the sociological and psychological repression of women in the patriarchal society. Women in general are conditioned by their own mothers in the patriarchal values. In this process of conditioning, they have to repress their basic nature and adopt a fake social identity for survival. The idea of motherhood is one such identity that is not innate but given to women by patriarchal ideological structure. Saru's mother herself is a repressed figure who experiences the feeling of unwantedness and rejection in her own childhood. Hence she has internalized these feelings of rejection and negligence as part of a girl's life. Later on, she attempts to repress her daughter's basic nature and tries to shape Saru exactly after herself. In the same fashion, Kasturi curtails Virmati's aspiration to study further and wants her daughter to be just like her. Uma's mother loves the daughter of her dreams – a beautiful, intelligent and traditional daughter – instead of an average looking, docile and submissive Uma. Therefore, she wants Uma to excel in household chores, without paying any heed to her daughter's education. Such indifferent attitude of her mother forces Uma to repress her urge to study and she remains a failure at each front of life. In the second part of the novel, Mrs. Patton conceives her daughter, Melanie, as a free and independent individual like herself; and therefore, never concerns herself with Melanie's eating habits. Therefore, such intense identification of the mother with her daughter results from the fact that they both have to undergo the same repressive experiences in the patriarchal society. Thus it is the mother who in the process of socialization, tries to shape the daughter after herself. This is the second conflicting stage in mother-daughter relationships.

The belief of the Marxists that "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (Chandra and Samy 119) seems very true in the present context. Each individual has a distinct attitude and inclination towards life that is primarily based on the kind of circumstances in which one lives. Therefore, circumstances constitute the self of the individual. This postulation is very significant in the understanding of mother-daughter conflicts. Initially belonging to the same gender, both mothers and daughters find their relation complementary and compensatory to each other. The daughter sees herself in her mother and thus identifies with her intensely. But when she enters in her adolescence and conceives a separate self of herself, the daughter feels suffocated in her relation with the mother and attempts to break free from her domination. Saru sees in her medical degree an escape from her mother's domination. She begins to hate everything that belongs to her mother, in one way or the other. However, Virmati tends to find love in the company of the professor, Harish, and renounces her mother's authority completely by becoming his second wife. In Uma's case, she turns inward to reject the mother's commands. She usually finds escape in her Christmas cards and bangle collection and in reading poetry. The daughter experiences powerlessness and may adopt several survival strategies to get rid of her mother's authority. Most of the time, it is marriage that is offered to girls by their mothers as an escape route. As a result, the daughter either submits to the mother's choice or rebels against it, searching her own individual identity. In such case, education seems to her the only refuge to assure some sort of independence. This is quite true in Saru's case. For her, education is the only means to carve out a space for herself in her mother's dejected home. Similarly, Virmati too finds solace in education to save herself from the ill fate of her mother, but unfortunately she meets the same. However, Uma submits to her mother's choice and meekly accepts marriage as a redeeming therapy that can save her from her mother's control. But all the three attempts to get her married end in fiasco and she cannot develop a separate self of herself. On the other hand, Melanie takes to candies and peanuts as a kind of reaction to her mother's insensitive and uncaring attitude. However, such kind of an attempt of the daughter towards independence usually hurts the ego of the mother and she feels deserted. This is the third conflicting stage in mother-daughter relationships.

All these engaging conflicts in mother-daughter relationships have been realistically portrayed by the present eminent novelists. Nowhere have they attempted to idealize or

eulogize the mother figure. Their representation of both mothers and daughters is objectively developed and convincingly depicted. But there lies a considerable complexity between seemingly simple surface narratives of mother-daughter relationship. These novelists have vividly unravelled them one by one with great dexterity. A stage comes in mother-daughter bonds where the daughter begins to detest her mother. She blames the mother for every single thing that has caused pain to her. But a very significant moment comes when the daughter herself attains motherhood. This phase of her life makes her experience the same kind of doubts, uncertainties and insecurities which were once felt for her by her own mother. Saru, when she sees in her own daughter, Renu, a resemblance to her own mother, wonders, "Will Renu turn mocking eyes on me one day? Will Abhi defy me? Will they betray me as I betrayed her?" (Deshpande 139). She attempts to identify herself with her mother not in the role of mother but as being a woman. In her attempt to divorce herself completely from her mother, and to be a sheer opposite of her mother, Saru ultimately and ironically ends up becoming a parable of Indian womanhood. Same is the case with Virmati's daughter, Ida. After knowing her mother's past, she comes to know that her mother too was a difficult daughter like her. This realization helps her to accept her mother's situation and character and she declares: "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" (Kapur 280). However, no such realization is arrived at by the daughters in Desai's novel. She tends to show the dangers of negligence, deprivation and indifference that have shrouded the mother-daughter relationships in the present time. Deprived of their mothers' care and concerns, both Uma and Melanie become patients of depression. If Uma's unarticulated frustrations find expression through fainting fits then Melanie vomits them out. In this way, all the significant ups and downs of mother-daughter relationships have been adequately presented by Deshpande, Kapur and Desai.

Though these novelists have dealt with the same theme, mother-daughter relationships, but they differ considerably in their vision. As far as Shashi Deshpande is concerned, she has presented what trials and tribulations a daughter has to face if she does not have a compatible relation with her mother. Saru remains emotionally and psychologically disturbed both in her adolescence and married life. Life almost becomes intolerable for her when her husband turns out to be a sadist. But after acknowledging her mother's situation during her sojourn at her

parental home, she feels confident now to face life anew. Thus for Deshpande, acceptance and understanding must reign supreme in mother-daughter relation. She also tends to view mother-daughter ties from a humanitarian standpoint, believing that one should rely on one's own self; there is no refuge from the burden of being alive. However, Manju Kapur views mother-daughter bond from that vantage point where the experiences of the mother meet with the experiences of the daughter and lead to a common understanding. Ida, daughter of Virmati, in her journey to her mother's past, measures her own state with the situation of her mother. She comes to know why Virmati, herself a difficult daughter, turns out to be a stern and strict mother, because in patriarchy, a mother has to become strict for the safety of her daughter. Ida wistfully remembers how her mother has tried to teach her the lesson to "Adjust, compromise, adapt" (Kapur 256). The daughter confronts the fact that it is not as simple to be a mother in the patriarchal society. Thus Kapur views this relationship in the broader context of woman's situation in the patriarchal society. Anita Desai's approach, however, to this relationship is somewhat more radical in comparison to Deshpande and Kapur. She views it in the modern context where the woman who is more conscious of her own individuality, has split herself from the duties of a mother. Now she does not perceive herself in her daughter; but instead, believes in cherishing her own individual freedom. By representing the miserable lot of Uma and Melanie, Desai pleads for the need of renovation in mother-daughter ties.

However, these writers in their present novels have not furnished any concrete solution. They merely tend to raise questions about the present tension-ridden state of mother-daughter relations. They ask the reader to meditate over this issue in the light of their observations. The task of finding any possible solution is completely left to the reader. What appears the fundamental problem here is the lack of communication. The mother should give her daughter ample opportunity to present her viewpoint instead of imposing her own decisions. The daughter too should provide an ear to her mother's observations and try to learn from the mother's experiences. Mutual trust should reign supreme in this complementary relation, leaving no space for doubt and misunderstanding. The daughter's individuality must be taken into consideration so that she can prove herself as equal to her male counterparts.

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