

MOTHER DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP IN ANITA DESAI'S FASTING FEASTING

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Mother, who has condescended on this earth to occupy the thrones of her children's life, the most loving creature on this earth, her only one glimpse is soothing and peace giving. All our ancient scriptures and epics are replete with the stories of mother. Mother's role has been always unquestioned and uncompromising. But in today's contemporary world, motherhood has been replaced with materialistic world. It results in various disorders and adversely affects child's psychology. Anita Desai's *Fasting Feasting* has been scrutinized to arrive at certain more insightful observations in the context of human relationships. The present paper is a study of human relationship especially of mother to her daughter. The paper attempts to present the emergent phenomenon that is lurking within the society.

Parenthood has been glorified and celebrated since times immemorial. All Puranas, Ramayana and Mahabharata, our ancient scriptures and religious epics, are replete with the sacrificing stories of fathers and mothers. In Indian society and culture their role has been unquestioned and uncompromising. In Hinduism parents have acquired a position of dignity similar to God and Goddess. Children from the very beginning of their birth are conditioned to have an unflinching devotion and reverence towards their parents.

Kahlil Gibran in his *The Mother* from *The Broken Wings* states that the most beautiful word on the lips of mankind is the word "Mother", and the most beautiful call is the call of "My Mother". It is a word full of hope and love, a sweet and kind word coming from the depths of the heart. The mother is everything- she is our consolation in sorrow, our hope in misery, and our strength in weakness. She is the source of love, mercy, sympathy and forgiveness.

But in the contemporary world, 'working hood' seems to have replaced their parenthood. Their alignment to materialistic world has become more important than their children. It results in various mental disorders and adversely affects child's psychology. It develops a sense of inferiority complex and unwantedness among the children. Anita Desai's *Fasting Feasting* has been scrutinized to arrive at certain more insightful observations in the context of human relationships.

The present novel *Fasting Feasting* recounts human relationship especially of mother to her daughter in the language not only of fasting and feasting but of greed, craving, taboo, denial and disgust. (Dasgupta viii)

The mothers of the first generation consider their daughters a burden due to their rigid societal set up which makes them look at girls as a burden. They cannot see their daughters go ahead of them or become equal to them. The daughters are treated as helping hands in various domestic chores. Mothers of the second generation are victims of patriarchy and do not want to repeat history, they fight for the rights of their daughters. Mothers of the third generation are like sisters to their daughters. They share their feelings.

Lucy Fisher in his work *Transitions in the mother- daughter relationship* comments that mothers and daughters identify with each other, and because their individual boundaries are not always clear, daughters struggle all their lives to separate (themselves) from their mothers. (292)

In this novel, parents have retain something of their own, a niche for their individual being, divorced from the duties of ideal parents. This novel gives an excruciating account of how society can seize control of individuals-especially women through such practices as eating, remove them from everything they intended to be. (Dasgupta viii)

The main objective of the paper is not to subvert the relationship of mother and daughter but to present the present emergent phenomenon that is lurking within the society, resulting in drastic consequences on the child's psychology. The first section of the novel deals with Uma's story in relation to her parents, with her sister Aruna and her brother Arun.

Mama papa, Papa Mama. Papa Mama.
It was hard to believe they had ever
had separate entities and not Mama
Papa in one breath. (Desai 5)

We can see how parents have merged into each other so intensely that now it appears quite difficult to conceive them as separate beings. They are addressed as Mama and Papa in the same breath. Andrew Robinson argues that

“In Papa and Mama, the Indian parents,
she creates two monsters of almost
Gothic proportions, locked into
inseparable marital disharmony,
determined to implicate in their
own daughters and only one son
...his wife in an undistinguished town.” (39)

Mother-daughter relationship is the best ever relationship on the earth. There always exist a special bond between mother and daughter. The novel present a relationship in which there is not a strong bond but it is completely dominated by patriarchy that the father represents. In the initial stage there is a special bond, but later on victims of papa. Moreover, the mother daughter relationship is the most complex. Anita Desai brings out the strained mother –daughter relationship.

“It is because ... his thoughts were
One, ... there was no point in appealing
to the other parent for a different verdict;
none was expected, or given.” (Desai, 14)

William James said: “the deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.” One of the most neglected virtue of mama papa for Uma is appreciation. Somehow, they neglect to praise Uma for her work. Nothing pleases children more than this kind of parental interest and approval.

Daughters of the Desai’s family, Uma and Aruna, receive only rejection from their parents. Uma’s mother remains busy with her husband on the swing or in going for kitty parties and playing cards with her female friends.

“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”.(Desai7)

Uma is burdened with the responsibility of her household, of her younger brother even before she can enjoy her own childhood. The eldest sister is made to act as a surrogate mother to her younger brother. A mother is treasure to her daughter. Mother has been always one of the biggest supporters to her daughter. The wisdom she accorded to her daughter is helpful to her over the years and helps in the development of the individual self.

“When Mama came home, weak, exhausted and short tempered, she tired 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”. (Desai8)

Thus, Uma’s mother from the very beginning burdens her, and made her to do the traditional role in a patriarchal world where girl is believed to be a housewife and a domestic servant. Her mother advocated her life. Once she says

“We are not sending you back to school, Uma. You are staying at home to help with Arun. (Desai 8)

School is a place where Uma find solace and peace, but she can’t be able to enjoy it. Uma seems to be a mere shadow of her parents ruled and guarded by them. Uma’s parent does not support her. She is made to remain a servant in her home, engaged in household chores which consume most of her valuable time. Uma wants to be educated but she is not supported. She is engaged in household chores which lead to her failure in academic curriculum. The novelist states

“... in spite of her raging enthusiasm, she was an abject scholar.... That did not turn to failure.”(Desai, 21)

Education is given to children in order to make them morally upright. But in Uma's home it is a hindrance that generally results in immorality and wastage of money and time. Mother are believed to be true friends to their daughters. Mother daughter relationship is the greatest asset but in this novel, Anita Desai presents subverted relationship where Mother herself is cutting the roots of her daughter. There are certain incidents in the novel where we see hoe Uma's mother is against her goodwill. Once Uma escapes from the house in the evening to meet Mother Agnes, so that she can be admitted again in the school. This independent step of her daughter infuriated her.

“See what these nuns do...
What ideas they fill in the
girls head! I always said
don't send them to a convent
school. Keep them at home.
I said-but who listened? And
now-I.”(Desai29)

Her mother attitude makes her submissive and docile. Uma is trained as a housewife. She chooses marriage for her daughter as a best thing for her future than her education. But a mother's love is like nothing else in this world. It knows no law, no pity. Instead of that it crushes down remorselessly all things that stands in its path. But here we see how Uma's mother is creating all troubles for her which suffocates her

“We are trying to arrange a
marriage for you. Not now,
she added...And learn to run
the house.” (Desai 22)

She is trained to serve her father delicacies like apples, oranges, bananas and lemonade at the right time. We have seen in this novel how education is little and marriage is offered to girls as a carrier. It seems as if Uma is a burden for her parents. But after her marriage she is brought back to her parental house where nobody cares about her. Uma was considered ill fated and her mother thinks that it was her daughter's bad luck and moreover her looks 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
likes Anamika. No that was not for her
she sighed”. (Desai 77)

Uma sometimes feel neglected by her mother. Most of her sufferings are caused by maternal apathy. Uma does not have a sympathetic shoulder to weep on. Alva Mrydal and Viola Klein points out that

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)

Uma is a victim of her parents indifference, she never develop a social self for herself. There is no understanding level between her and her parents. Mama burdens Uma for her own comfort for the responsibility of Arun's upbringing. Her mother quit her from school. Education helps in shaping and mental development of the person. Her parents never allow her to be independent. She can neither sit alone in her room nor visit her neighbors. Every time her parents keep her busy in one or more work.

“Never earned anything in her life,
made me spend, on the dowry and
her wedding, oh, yes, spend till I'm
ruined, till I am a pauper”

(Desai 149)

This shows the diplomatic behavior of her parents. On the one hand, they do not allow her to cross the household and on the other they blamed her for earning nothing. This clearly shows that she is a burden on her parents who themselves does not want her to earn as she is offered twice during the course of the novel. These result in her baffling, her lack of confidence and devoid of an emotional support. Her parents are unkind to her. Her mother never bothers about her daughter Uma. She has a very detached outlook towards her daughter. Such unemotional outlook by her leads to depression, withdrawal, clumsy behavior and hysteria. Nancy Chodorow, one of the feminist psychoanalysts draws her attention towards mother - daughter relationship and she argues that mothers experience their daughters as their “doubles” as an extension of their own life. Therefore we can say that daughters find it difficult to form their own niche.

Through her novel, Anita Desai tries to reflect the realities of the lives of the common girls. She tries to present the complete disinterestedness of mother towards Uma, which leave her completely shattered. Anita Desai has presented us power of selfishness of a mother towards her daughter. *Fasting, Feasting* gives us a critique of mother –daughter relationship, tracing it through the character of Uma and her mother. Anita Desai has given us an unforgettable picture of the evolution of Indian woman's psyche. Thus, *Fasting Feasting* is a warning to the mothers who are completely engrossed in their individual self by rejecting their daughter's right to be loved and cared. It is a pointer to how a mother's influence could be unsettling to the daughter under different circumstances. Thus this paper highlights how a mother, traditionally epitome of sacrifice and goodness could become a symbol of selfishness and resentment to her children and how unconditional love and affection could be replaced.

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