



Unveiling Feminine Bonds: Nurturing Connections and Empowerment in Contemporary Indian Literature

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ABSTRACT

The traditional field of psychoanalysis was historically shaped by the works of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, who formerly disseminated a contentious opinion regarding the literary abilities of women think, that women were seen to be naturally unfit for extraordinary literary production since they were supposedly inferior to males. This idea was based on the symbolic construct of the "phallus," which Freud and Lacan claimed women lacked, resulting in their inferiority in their creative endeavours. Lacan developed this idea further, proposing that the "phallus" stood for entrance into the more expansive domain of symbolic language. In this context, language acquisition difficulties faced by female children impeded their linguistic development and hindered their ability to identify with the father's figure. K.K. Ruthven in her work Feminist Literary Studies has referenced Lacan's assertion on femininity that states that language has its roots in ancient patriarchal society. Hence, they run the risk of either being marginalised within the social structure or being forced to adopt the role of pseudo-maleness

Gynocritics, a feminist subfield of literary criticism, on the other hand, passionately disagreed with the notion that women writers are inherently inferior. Gynocritics contested Freud's idea that "the penis is the pen," refusing to fit into male-centric stereotypes. Rather, they supported an approach that saw writing as an intellectual endeavour that transcended physical characteristics. Gynocritics immediately challenged the conventional psychoanalytical theory that associated women's creative potential with their biological makeup. They essentially claimed that the writer's intellect and consciousness contained all the necessary elements for writing, enabling women to create literary works that were on par with those of men. Gynocritics, by rejecting marginalization and claiming women's full potential to make meaningful and long-lasting contributions to the literary environment, essentially seized the narrative surrounding women's literary contributions. Gynocritics boldly challenged and overthrew long-standing, male-dominated beliefs, opening the door for a more fair and inclusive assessment of women's literary accomplishments and, in the process, changing the conversation about gender and creativity.

Introduction

In *Ruthven* (1984, 98), Lacan asserts forcefully that women are caught in a predicament from which there is no escape if we consider femininity to be a fiction created by language, and language is ingrained in a culture that is dominated by patriarchy. Hence in the prevailing scenario, they are forced to take on one of two subject positions: they either become marginalized as women in a system that does not fully account for their experiences, or they embrace a pseudo-male identity to fit into the male-centric linguistic framework. Gynocritics, on the other hand, take a different stance. They oppose the narrative of marginalization and reject the idea that women's literature is worse. Gynocritics reject Freud's idea that "the penis is the pen," challenging the presumptions and comparisons of conventional psychoanalysts. They consider writing to be a cognitive activity, and they sketch a stark contrast to traditional psychoanalysis's methods. Gynocritics disagree with the idea that women's experiences are inherently "lackful," arguing instead that mother-daughter relationships are powerful sources of empowerment. They propose that the psychodynamics of female connection form a deep and unique tie among women, especially women authors. According to Jean Baker Miller's work, *Towards a New Psychology of Women* (1976), the research carried out by the Stone Centre members at the Wellesley Centre for Women during the 1970s and 1980s, has contributed to a paradigm shift in the understanding of women's psychology. According to her, "*Women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation with others*" (p 83, Miller). She contended that women saw themselves as others in their social circles, frequently making investments to build their sense of self and identity about roles such as daughters, spouses, and mothers. This dependence on roles of care, sacrifice, nurturing, and tolerance stands in sharp contrast to the patriarchal society's values of success and dominance. According to critics, the prevailing patriarchal society with its prevalent norms prevents men from taking up the roles of compassion and caregiving. The central theme of such stories which has now evolved where females are the protagonists, is generally "women-centred". Such writings elaborately depict their inborn pliability and spiritual well-being. Their innate nature is compassion, drawing connections and nurturing relationships which form a key to building society. Psychologists who emphasize the nature and role of women boldly declare that their sole reason for being devalued and marginalized lies in their approach of demeaning themselves and upholding the masculinity which thereby results in limited personal growth, with little or no voice at all in society. This feeling of not being heard or finding no space to let out emotion makes them feel devalued.

Carol Gilligan, in her work *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982), attracts attention to the conflicting ethical outlooks apprehended by males and females, observing that though womanly ethics is categorized by a "responsibility orientation," male ethics often inclines on the road to "justice orientation." Gilligan contends that caring for others and encouraging their inclusion is central to women's moral values and sense of self. She criticizes psychology for persistently misinterpreting the experiences of women.

Nancy Chodorow, in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978), notes that contemporary methods of raising children lead to different needs for emotional connection in girls and a demand for independence in guys. Boys tend to grow more emotionally aloof with their transition from their early affiliation with their moms to conforming to socially acceptable

male roles. However, girls may become emotionally reliant on their moms as a result of their long-standing affinity with them, which could leave them more open to abuse.

Miller and Stiver's work in 1997, *Healing Connection: How Women Form Relationships in Therapy and Life* (1997), shows the significant influence of motherhood on women's subservient roles in society. They explore the many difficulties that women encounter while fostering and maintaining relationships that are growth-oriented, asking why some women find it difficult to connect in the first place and offering solutions to these problems. The writer brings to light the various emotional, mental, and psychological hardships that confront women with her desire to frame intimate relationships. It's ironic to witness that the root for their argument and repression lies in their desire for a healthy relationship—that endorses authorization and individual progress for both parties. Stiver and Miller have raised only five requirements (achievement, information, value, passion, and a yearning for profound networks) to fulfil or empower any relationship. It is frequently perceived that females in quest of proximate relationships frequently violate their true identities by hiding or repressing emotions that do not conform to social norms, especially those derived from male culture. To highlight the inner psychology of the females the writers lay stress on interrogating the instinctive compassionate connection among females to acquire deeper insights into the female psyche. They highlight compassion as a crucial attribute that patriarchal regimes simultaneously encourage and condemn as an irrational impulse. Clear communication might be impeded and relationships strained by ineffective caregiving or receiving. However, it is often seen, that caring, empathy, and nurturing are not given enough credit in our society. By providing alternative frameworks for understanding female friendships, it challenges male-centric perspectives on the psychological growth of women.

Since gender roles are rigidly defined in India, sisterhood, or female bonding, is very significant there. It serves as a strong link that promotes growth and gives women the confidence to confront patriarchal power systems that maintain gender inequity. Furthermore, understanding the mother-daughter bond is essential to understanding women's psychology. Sudhir Kakkar in his book *Inner World* has said, "*Women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation with other*" (Pp-83, Miller: 1976). Daughters and mothers remain close, with daughters picking up life lessons from their experiences, challenges, and emotional nuances. Mothers influence the formation of identities by teaching their daughters about attachments and relationships. Despite patriarchal expectations, women's courage, love, and strength from their mothers and female companions play a major role in helping them to build strong, individual identities.

Miller and Stiver, state five key elements (energy, action, knowledge, price, desire) in fostering and empowering relationships. These attributes are essential to women's self-actualization and general well-being, the authors argue that cultural attitudes on nurturing, empathy, and caregiving should be re-evaluated as females generally curb their desire or compromise their self only to align themselves with the societal world. A fundamental component of women's collective identity is their innate interconnectivity, and the idea of sisterhood gives them the confidence to take on obstacles and fight patriarchal norms, forging a territory of their own.

Carol Gilligan claims that this is the initial phase of female development. If we take the example of one of the most assured voices in modern Indian literature in English, Indira Goswami, she uses the

female psyche to examine both personal and societal dilemmas. She has disclosed the innermost thoughts and feelings of her female characters. She is far more outspoken in expressing her worries and fears about the future of women in unwelcoming environments than other Indian women novelists of the 20th century. Due to her exceptional understanding of the female psyche and her focus on the marginalization of women in Indian society, her novels are primarily about strong female protagonists who overcome adversity, subvert patriarchal norms, rebel against male dominance, and ultimately succeed in their quest for self-identity. She focuses on the world of metropolitan women and all of their enormous issues and difficulties. Her female leads are self-conscious and delicate. They go through a lot of turbulence and pain. They want to rebel against the stereotypes that society has placed them in. They downplay their own emotions, they are at odds with their inner selves.

The idea of female bonding emerges naturally in Indian culture, which is rife with gender segregation and societal hierarchies based on class and caste norms. In India, female bonds are even more profound because the dominant discourse largely excludes male involvement in domestic spheres. Taking the example of *Under the Shadow of Kamakhya* by Mamoni Raisom Goswami we observe that the female character in this short story, Padmapriya, has white leprosy, or leucoderma which led her to an odd treatment. In the androcentric society, she is treated as a pointless, meaningless object and is merely a dead entity devoid of movement and desire for life. Her life's ambitions have all vanished. The patriarchal culture degrades her rather than encourages her. Yashobai, her mother, is the only person who can provide her motivation and happiness in this dire position. Her mother provides her with all the support and bravery she needs to courageously oppose the entire patriarchal system. She can only get inspiration from Yashobai to give her life purpose. She gives her courage and inspiration to overcome all of life's obstacles, including those brought forth by society. When patriarchal culture tries to demoralize her rather than offering compassion and the strength to face the illness. Therefore, Indira Goswami challenges the patriarchal culture's power and emphasizes the mother-daughter bond through the example of Padmapriya. The mother-daughter bond is a crucial topic in comprehending the psychology of women. Mothers are seen as protective trees that provide warmth, compassion and love to their offspring. A mother's love and compassion for her daughter gives her the strength and capacity to handle any challenge in the world. Padmapriya's mother acts as a shield for her against the patriarchal system, and as a result, she helps her understand the harsh reality of a world ruled by men. According to Goswami,

I mean, has he seen your ... hand ... your heaving bosom ... your ... Men are like wolves. Once they taste flesh, they turn into man eaters. Anyone who has spent even one night with you ... Haven't you heard how the maneaters swallow even the blood soaked clothes of their victims. Human flesh is intoxicating. And the craze for human flesh is even more powerful in humans than it is among animals (P 47& 48, Goswami)

The physical infirmity of a woman is ridiculed by patriarchal culture. Her sorrow and suffering are caused by the white blotches on her body. Her husband and in-laws send her back due to these white patches the family starts to feel burdened by her because of the constant harassment she receives from patriarchy, leading to her unstable mental condition. The author describes how, after entering her room alone, she reached up and took down the little mirror that was mounted on the

wall. She then removed the blouse that she was wearing. There she was, in her fragile chemise. She emerged from her chemise slowly, as if in a dream, and knelt on the ground. After neatly folding the chemise was set on the bed. The cool breeze tickled her bare skin, making her shudder. She then turned, holding the mirror out from behind, and twisted to get a better look at the tiny place on her back. She couldn't see anything. She recalled that before she could see the area, her mother had stripped her naked. Thus, this is the mark that the Shastri family refers to as white leprosy or leucoderma, "her mother screamed" (P 41&42, Goswami).

Here, the mirror serves as a patriarchal metaphor, illuminating the tragedies in her existence. The patriarchal culture values a woman's physical attractiveness above everything else, regardless of who she is. The white spots caused by leprosy, made Padmapriya lose her beauty and charm. As a result, patriarchal culture has cast her outside of their social group, where she now lives a lonely and sad life. Consequently, Padmapriya's spouse abandons her to a lonely, painful life devoid of affection and empathy. However, her mother Yashobai turns into an inspiration for her in this pitiful circumstance. She constantly gives her support, educates her about the realities of the patriarchal culture, and demands that she leave her depressing life behind. She reprimands Padmapriya:

What have you been doing here the entire day? Why do you bury yourself in this dark room? Come out. Immediately (Goswami: 2001,42). She further consoles and sympathizes with her: What's the matter my child? Why are you crying so? Is it the spot on your back? Has it grown? Let me see, show me. If that is what it is, don't worry, my child. We will send you to the best doctors for treatment. You will be cured. Don't cry, don't (Goswami: 2001, 64).

Yashobai's outburst in front of her son-in-law Bhuvaneshwar represents not just her rage over Patriarchy's mistreatment of these women, but also of Indira Goswami. She informed Bhuvaneshwar, "Do you think you can bring in one girl through the front door and throw the other one out through the back door? Do you think women are sheeps and goats that you can buy and sell as you please? Do you?" (p,71-72, Goswami: 2001). In *The Shadow of Kamakhya*, the womanly experiences are powerfully described by the voice of Yashobai, which is Indira Goswami herself. Here, 'The Dark and Lonely Room' is a symbol of the life of Padmapriya which is given to her by patriarchy, and Padmapriya with the help of her mother, comes out of this 'The Dark and Lonely Room'. This statement illustrates the mentality of the patriarchal society that if a woman becomes useless, she is discarded from his life, and he brings another woman for his selfish purpose. However, he does not consider that woman who is discarded from his life. Therefore, Indira Goswami tries to give women a respectable place in the manmade culture. Sisterhood and female bonding are concepts that are crucial to comprehend women's psyches because they bring women together to share common experiences. After all, a woman can only empathize with other disadvantaged women. Women's identities are collective, so they are inextricably linked to relationships. Women who had a sisterhood experience feel warm, sympathetic, and strong enough to fearlessly tackle challenges. Here, Indira Goswami presents the topic of female bonding—the desire on the part of a privileged woman to assist a less fortunate one—as a means by which women attempt to challenge patriarchy and forge their own identities. It is

important for the construction of identities and for keeping women in the patriarchal system. Women find their place in the "inner courtyard," where the feminine aura is supreme, in a society where the male and female worlds are rigidly segregated. Women seek to create close bonds and a sense of belonging when they are outside of the male domain and safe from the male gaze. Women can oppose the patriarchal power structure by banding together. Female bonding is normal in Indian society, where there is a social order based on caste and class hierarchy and gender segregation. Here men are generally excluded from the domestic sphere by the prevailing rhetoric, female bonding is stronger in India.

The sisterly relationship is central to Padmapriya's relationship with her close friend Lawanya, which is a mature and intimate relationship similar to Padmapriya's relationship with her mother. Lawanya is the first person to give Padmapriya courage and determination in the face of patriarchal culture, so Padmapriya's bond with her mother and friend helps her transform into a bolder and more self-assured person, as demonstrated in Padmapriya's transformation, "*Lawanya entered the room and hugged her.(46). Padmapriya stood silently, her head bowed low. She did not reply. Instead, she walked forward with bold, confident steps. No one had seen such assurance in her during these past two years*" (Goswami: 2001, 67).

With the help of her mother and a friend, Padmapriya attempts to rise above the difficult circumstances in her life by growing white flowers, which stand for hope for a better life and self-improvement. The white blooms' growth reflects her increasing will to escape terrible conditions. By the time the story comes to a finish, Padmapriya's bond with her mother and friend has given her the confidence to express her mind. She boldly proclaims that Sambhudev is her child's father, so subverting her husband's authority. This audacious proclamation establishes Padmapriya's uniqueness and self-identity and reflects her unflinching commitment to live life on her terms.

In modern feminist psychological research, the mother-daughter relationship is a fundamental issue that plays a significant role in molding the identity and psyche of women. Because they are the same gender as their moms, daughters don't completely cut their ties; instead, they take in all of their mother's sorrows, setbacks, and underlying strength. The boundaries between a daughter's identity formation and her relationship with her mom are often blurred when mothers view their daughters as extensions of themselves.

Hence we conclude that *Under the Shadow of Kamakhya* by Mamoni Raisom Goswami focuses on the courage, love, and power that women get from their relationships with other women, their mothers, and friends. These links enable people to claim their identities without the limitations of patriarchy, finally disobeying its harsh judgments.

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