

# Portrayal of Father-Daughter Relationship in the Works of Arundhati Roy and Anita Desai –A Comparative Study

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Father-daughter relationship is one of the significant man-woman relationships. The personality, behavior and temperament of father directly affect the life of a daughter. The father is the first man with whom a girl interacts in her life. A healthy relationship between a father and a daughter helps a girl to adjust with other male relations she is associated with as brother, husband etc. It also helps a girl to develop positive or negative opinion for the common lot of men. Both Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy have portrayed the effect of this relationship on the life of a girl.

Anita Desai in *Cry, the Peacock* has presented intense love between Maya and her father. Maya, a motherless child never feels the absence of her mother. She lives as the most admired child of her father. Father too, even being an over-busy person, remains very particular about the sensitivity and needs of his daughter. Her childhood is just a fairy world with no sufferings and problems, everything so smooth and comfortable. Maya's life at her father's home can be well described through these lines of the novel:

As a child I enjoyed princess like, a sumptuous fare of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights, the glories and bravado of Indian mythology, long and astounding tales of princess and regal queens, jackals and tigers, and being my father's daughter, of the lovely English and Irish Fairy Tales as well, that were read out to me him.... (Desai 41)

The life of Maya appears to be a world of fairies and fantasies. But Maya's father makes her misfit as he always tries to keep his daughter away from the stark realities of life.

Maya's father plans her daughter's marriage wisely. He chose Gautama for Maya. Gautama came to their home as a protégé of her father. But both Gautama and Maya showed no sign of love and affection for each other but agree to marry. Maya's father opines Gautama to be the suitable match for his daughter because he has nurtured and raised Maya in such a way that she is helpless without a 'father-figure'.

Gautama is much older to Maya, almost twice her age. But, all the calculations of Maya's father failed when Gautama fails to feel the sensitivity of Maya and criticized her upbringing declaring Maya "neurotic" and "a spoilt baby", "father's pet", "spoilt and cosseted" to whom "life is a fairy tale"(Desai 78). Maya grows restless and alienated. Maya's father –fixation may be regarded as one of the biggest reason for her mal-adjustment with her husband. R.A.Singh rightly points out Maya's suffering and holds her father equally responsible for it. Singh neither denies Gautama responsible for Maya's condition nor blames him entirely for it. According to R.S.Singh, "Her alienation is not only due to Gautama's indifference, but she herself and partly her father is responsible for the same" (47). Maya fails to come out of the fairy world designed by her father and fails to adjust with her practical and emotionless husband.

Anita in her second novel, *Voices in the City* describes the weak bond between Monisha and her father. The father is an acute drunkard and an irresponsible man. In *Voices in the City*; we do not find any piece of conversation between Monisha and her father. Monisha's father intentionally pushes her into the drudgery of life. Her father knows that Jiban and his family is just opposite to the taste and temperament of her daughter, even though he preferred Jiban and Monisha is doomed to hell by marrying a typical, non – responsive man who belongs to a conservative Bengali Family. Monisha fails to adjust with Jiban and his family and ultimately commits suicide. A father who is expected to wish best for his daughter, Monisha's father is an exception to it.

Anita Desai in her novel *Bye Bye Black Bird* has depicted the life of an English girl, Sarah, who lives away from her parents and works at a Convent school in London. There is not much description about her childhood days as we see in *Cry the Peacock*. Sarah marries an Indian guy, Adit Sen whom she meets in a party organized by her friend. Her parents do not attend the marriage of their daughter. Adit whose parents were far away from him always remains in his heart, but, he is surprised to learn that Sarah and her parents have no contact with each other. He blames Sarah for the negligence towards her parents, as she is too irresponsible and doesn't write a single letter. Adit makes up a plan to visit Sarah's parents. When she enters her parental home, she finds her father missing. She then like a small child rushes to the field in search of her father. She expects that her father will be over-whelmed at her presence and would readily greet her with his open arms. But, she gets disappointed to see that, "he gave no signs of recognizing them

or being pleased at their presence” (Desai 146). Sarah feels as if her father has never loved her, she has become a stranger. She fails to think the cause of her father’s changed behaviour and decides to leave her parents and go to India with Adit forever.

*Fire on the Mountain* represents the relationship between Raka and her father to be nothing more than a terrible episode in the life of Raka. There is no glimpse of the conversation between them, but Raka has secretly visualized the tyranny of her father on his mother. She has witnessed the overtures of her father on her mother and also sensed the helplessness of her mother. It can be well described through these lines in the novel:

Somewhere behind them (curtains), behind it all was her father, home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of the night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse-harsh, filthy abuse that made Raka cover under her bedclothes and wet her mattress in fright, feeling the stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of blood, and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept ... (Desai 72)

Raka is frightened of her father and his father too never cares her. Seeing the relationship between her parents, Raka develops distrust for all the human relationships.

Relationship between Sita and her father is also disappointing in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*. As her father was a freedom fighter, he remained most of the time in jail. After the independence of the country, they settled down in Manori. Everybody in the island had great respect for him. Sita’s father set an ashram and many followed his ideals and principles. He was considered to be a legend in Manori because of his new ideas and magic cures. Sita, who is a motherless child experienced partiality, neglect, indifference from her father. Sita’s father had no time for his children and, especially, Sita did not get even a drop of his love and care. Sita always longs for her father’s love but fails.

She always feels herself discarded and unwanted. Her father’s partiality towards Rekha further creates a rift between the sisters. After her father’s death, her brother, Jivan reveals the truth that Rekha is not their real sister. For Sita, “his words had dropped on her skin like acid...” (Desai 79). Unlike Maya’s father, Sita’s father had not discharged his duties of a father to marry off his daughter before dying. Raman,

the son of her father's friend takes charge of Sita and marries her. Yet, Sita continues to remain obsessed with her father and flatly declares that Raman has married her, "out of pity, out of lust, out of sudden will for adventure, and because it was inevitable-married her" (Desai 89). Sita's 'father –obsession' is nothing, but a source to escape from the hostile environment of her home. Karan Horney in *Neurosis and Human Growth* has described that "mother or father obsession arises out of environmental situation. In order to compensate for the hostile environment at home a child clings to one of the parents"(124). Sita had received unfair treatment from her parents that made her look at the futility of every relationship. It is only at the end of the novel that she is able to draw the conclusion that her 'father –obsession' has made her to look the world differently.

Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* has shown the ugly face of father-daughter relationship under the strict control of Patriarchy. Although, it is exceptionally seen to be missing in the first generation represented by Reverend John Ipe and Aleyooty Ammachi, who gave both the children, Pappachi and Baby Kochamma enjoy equal rights in all respects. Although there is no glimpse of conversation between Reverend Ipe and his daughter, the novel explains in detail the love and care of a father for his daughter. Baby Kochamma, initially known as Navomi Ipe, gets converted into Roman Catholic for her one –sided affair with an Irish monk, Father Mulligan. When this secret of Baby Kochamma is revealed, her father fears that, his daughter will not be able to get a good husband for herself. Reverend Ipe facilitated Baby Kochamma by sending her for further studies in 'Ornamental Gardening'. She lives with the same rights as Pappachi in Ayemenem house. The relationship between Baby Kochamma and her father is special and stands out among the relationships depicted in other generations.

The next generation is represented by Pappachi and his wife, Mammachi. They have two children- Ammu and Chacko. Chacko is brought up with a silver spoon in his mouth, and it continues till the end of the novel. He is sent to Oxford for higher studies although he is undeserving. Ammu, on the other, is expelled from the school as her father declares high education for girl as 'an unnecessary expense' (Roy 38). Ammu remains a burden for him. She longs for her father's love, but Pappachi symbolizes a typical father, adhering to the strict norms of Patriarchy, who do not believe in equality between men and women. He regularly beats his wife and is jealous of her. He regularly beats his wife and feels jealous of her. Rashmi

Bajaj points out with reference to the father -daughter relationship within Patriarchy as “Women like this relationship as this is the only male relationship which provides protection and affection without the physical in it. It is disliked as father is the first dominating male in life and a representative of the patriarchal society” (69). Ammu, thus, becomes the victim of the patriarchal society. She is compelled to cooperate with her mother in domestic chores. Fed up with the morbid atmosphere at Ayemenem, with an “ill-tempered father and bitter long suffering mother” (Roy 39), Ammu makes several wretched plans to escape her parental home. When she luckily gets a chance to go to Calcutta to her aunt, Ammu marries without her parent's consent. But unfortunately her marriage proves to be a big trap. Soon she realizes the futility of her marriage with a drunkard, who beats Ammu and victimizes children. He readily agrees to barter his wife to his English boss, but, Ammu refuses to submit herself and returns back to Ayemenem with her twins. She and her twins are treated as uninvited guests and receive humiliation and neglect at in her parental house. It becomes unbearable for Ammu when her father declares her tragedy as fake saying that “No English man can covet anybody’s wife”(Roy 42).The distrust of her father makes her rebellious and she steps out in search of love and understanding of which she is denied right from her childhood. She feels no shame to associate with Velutha, an untouchable whom she regards far better than the ‘touchable’. Arundhati Roy blindly admits, what Simone De Beauvoir stated in her notable work *The Second Sex*. She has described the importance of father’s love in a girl’s life. In addition to it, Beauvoir also described the terrible consequences that arise in its absence, thus:

If her father shows affection for his daughter, she feels that her existence is magnificently justified; she is endowed with all the merits that others have to acquire with difficulty; she is fulfilled and deified. All her life she may longingly seek that lost state of plentitude and peace. If the father’s love is withheld, she may ever after feel herself guilty and condemned; or she may look elsewhere for appreciation of herself or become indifferent to her father or even hostile. (315)

Ammu in her parental home has always felt restless and frustrated as there was no affinity her and her father.

Both Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy have depicted the uniqueness of a Father –daughter relationship as one which demands love and care and the absence of which leads to maladjustments and

psychosomatic problems in a woman's life. As the first man in her life he continues to remain the pillar of strength for her throughout her life.

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