

Intergenerational Feminism in Gitanjali Shree's Mai and Tomb of Sand: Conflict or Continuity?

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Abstract

In recent decades writers of contemporary Indian women's literature have shifted from the essentialist victim model used by early Indian feminist literature; this literature has suggested a more complex revision of the victim narrative since early on. Indian women writers have paid attention to the categories of memory, silence, resistance, and generational shifts to reflect on the wider idea of identity. Gitanjali Shree gives us two examples where altering configurations of female identity across various generations show its connections to identity, memory, silence, resistance, and generational change. This paper examines how resistance becomes a transgenerational trauma transmitted through silence, and how motherhood can be seen as resistance against patriarchy and capitalism. It also looks at how memory is used as an act of resistance to reclaim lost history. Identifying oneself based on the mother reflects invisible resistance. Lastly, this study reveals how female subjectivity is shaped by the resistance of the previous generation. The research demonstrates that feminism in Shree's works is not a clear-cut case of old versus new, tradition versus modernity, as many scholars have earlier assumed, but rather an evolving continuum of experience and empowerment. This study also contends that Shree is neither a radical nor a traditional feminist, but rather a complex hybrid of the two. Because her works interweave the personal with the political, Shree must be read as a writer who perceives the limitations of the personal but who can also see the potential of personal being political.

Keywords: Intergenerational feminism, Gitanjali Shree, Mai, Tomb of Sand, postcolonial feminism, motherhood, silence, resistance.

Introduction

In recent years literature of feminist standpoint in India has begun to put emphasis on suppressed memory and the implication for the female self. The memory motif transcends self-narratives and connections while also establishing a symbol of resistance in the recovery of a name. Several Indian women writers adopted the memory and body politics approach to analyzing Indian literary feminist standpoint focusing on memory and the female self-relation.

Gitanjali Shree stands out from other modern Indian writers because of the innovative way she writes and the intense focus she has on the emotional and psychological experiences of women. Her books aren't just condemning how society is male-dominated — they look at the quiet strategies women use to confront power imbalances related to family, community, as well as the weight of the past.

Mai tells the tale of a mother who keeps silence in the household. Seemingly meek and mute, her silence rather stands for the emotional resilience and covert revolt. The youth in the book strives to unearth and throw down the oppressive building blocks of the mother's life.

On the other hand, in *Tomb of Sand*, the old woman does not accept the fate of invisibility and stagnation prescribed by social conventions. Instead, through physical and symbolic journeys, she revolts against all attempts to confine her, thus reaffirming the position of autonomy adopted in old age.

This paper will look at the ways in which the two novels represent the shift in feminist consciousness from one generation to another. It seeks to explore whether the younger generation denies and discards the older women and their experiences or if contemporary feminist agency is made possible by the inherited histories of silence and suffering.

Significance

The present study assumes significance for two reasons; first, it is a comparative study of intergenerational feminism in two novels by Gitanjali Shree, *Mai*, and *Tomb of Sand*. Second, it provides a thematic perspective to study the transformation of women's experiences in the world of these novels with reference to the themes of silence, motherhood, memory, and resistance, and their contribution to feminist consciousness.

The study aims to show the manner in which women's experiences have been variedly transformed across generations. It will also show how, differently from conventional patriarchal discourse, silence, motherhood, memory, and resistance have been conceptualized as strategies of raising feminist consciousness in women, and bringing about a feminist re-visioning of female identity and reclaiming the self in women.

Research Questions

1. How are intergenerational relationships among women depicted in *Mai* and *Tomb of Sand*?
2. In what ways does silence function as a form of resistance in *Mai*?
3. How is the reconsideration of female identity related to old age in *Tomb of Sand*?
4. In the novels, is traditional womanhood rejected or redefined by the younger women?
5. How are memory and personal history employed in the construction of a feminist consciousness in both novels?

Assumption

The present study assumes that the representation of women and intergenerational relationships in the novels drawing on feminist ideas to interpret silence, memory, motherhood, and resistance as conceptual categories. Silence, memory, motherhood, and resistance can be understood as the respective absence or presence of a voice, recollections, the mother, and oppositional behavior and attitudes in relation to the social construction of female identity as represented mainly by the female characters in the novels. Postcolonial feminist theory and feminist generational theory are suitable approaches to our analysis because they focus on specific categories that function to repress and/or express self-identities of female individuals in postcolonial contexts.

Limitation

The present study is limited to the feminist analysis of *Mai* and *Tomb of Sand*. The study at hand will be focusing on intergenerational feminism and the themes of silence, motherhood, identity and resistance in the novels. Since the study follows a qualitative and textual approach, the interpretations are solely based on a close reading and a critical analysis of the selected texts and the available secondary sources. The political, historical and linguistic dimensions of the novels will be discussed in the broader context wherever they will corroborate the feminist interpretation of the study.

Review of Literature

Various scholars have studied the writings of Gitanjali Shree from feminist and postcolonial perspectives. Existing analyses of *Mai* often mainly concentrate on domestic patriarchy, silence, motherhood, and so on. Critics usually argue that *Mai* stands for the invisible pain of countless Indian women stuck in the vice-like grip of the traditional, ritual-bound, extended patriarchal household; within this context, silence submits her to familial oppression and societal repression. Most studies tend to take her silence in the literal sense of the term, subtly ingrained in the female psyche over time through the process of socialization, prompting the female subject to internalize patriarchal authority.

Existing research on *Tomb of Sand* primarily tends to focus on Partition, border politics, aging, and experimental narrative, and the barren landscape and old age of the protagonist, Meemamsa-ni, in conjunction with the lifeless monstrosity in her belly, perhaps a kind of withered placenta, reappear as under-theorized figures with respect to aging and the aging female body. Some investigations also note the unconventionality of the novel's style and, within the context of border politics, the narrative representation of female mobility in old age. A few critics also discuss the relationship between identity and national boundaries.

Hypotheses

Gitanjali Shree's feminism is rather a process- one that extends over generations. The silent older women in *Mai* is read as a hidden resistance, from within. In *Tomb of Sand*, the intergenerational conflicts lead to a more positive and a liberated form of agency. The younger protagonists in both the novels, shown to inherit the biological sex and the mental disquiets of the earlier generation, to a large extent. The presence of intergenerational feminism in Gitanjali Shree's novels rather posits a sense of continuities than a generational conflict of total break.

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, analytical, and comparative research approach. It is an interpretive study, based on a textual analysis and thematic study. The research is classified as qualitative research, which aims to interpret literary forms rather than use statistics or quantities. This research is conducted through an integrated approach of feminist literary criticism and postcolonial feminist theory. The study's structure is an intertextual comparative analysis of certain texts concerning thematic, characterization, narrative form, symbols motive, silence, memory, and gender.

Intergenerational Feminism in *Mai*

In the character "*Mai*", the mother figure has been shown to be passive, silent, and emotionally repressed, performing the duties of a housewife without questioning her authority under patriarchy. This mother figure seems to epitomize the image of the sacrificial Indian mother and conforms to patriarchal values. However, this typical image of the mother has been ironized by the author to depict the emotional world and mental trauma endured by such a mother under the veneer of silence.

Mai's silence should not be understood as her submission to patriarchy, as the daughter imagines. It is her strategy for survival within a hostile environment. All her emotions that she had to suppress for survival in a

patriarchal society are subtly brought to the fore and the reader becomes aware of them. We notice that she is a subject through the emotions that she is made to repress. Mai maintains power through her endurance and silence. She is emotionally more powerful than her husband. Because of her emotional intelligence, she becomes aware when the head of the family behaves irrationally and knows when to control him and the situation.

Feminist Transformation in Tomb of Sand

Differently from the stillness of Mai's house, in Tomb of Sand we find motion, expansion, and change. The old protagonist doesn't want to be locked in her emotions after her husband's death. She refuses to put life aside and embarks on a journey to find herself.

The novel undermines general assumptions on elders and women. Old women are seen as dependent, passive or socially non-existent people. Nevertheless, the old woman in Tomb of Sand returns to be herself through laughter, travel, friendship, and memories.

The relation between the mother and the daughter in the novel is one of the conversational and fluid feminisms. The daughter at the beginning tries to lead and protect her mother, yet she finally lets her be who she wants to be.

The journey on the border India-Pakistan works as a metaphor on the process of liberation from social and political ties. The protagonist moves over the borders and beyond the fixed notion of genders at the same time. Differently from Mai, who suffers silently, the protagonist in Tomb of Sand builds her new life over her own ruins without hiding them. However, the link between the two women is in their shared history in the acting and re-acting feminine.

Silence, Memory, and Motherhood

Silence is a common theme in both novels, but its interpretation changes across generations. In Mai, silence represents suppression, subjugation, and emotional sustenance. Mai hardly vocalizes her torment. Instead, her silence influences the psyche of her oppressors. Silence is turned into a dialect of resilience.

In The Tomb of Sand, silence is adapted into memory and introspection. The protagonist confronts interrupted pasts including Partition sensibility and personal passings. Rather than be imprisoned in silence, she shapes recollection into motion and art.

Motherhood likewise changes distinctly. Mai accomplishes motherhood as liability and self-negation. The mother symbol in The Tomb of Sand quests for independence over and above motherly identification. Feminism thus gets altered over generations. The novels nevertheless hint at connection for the reason that the daughters turn into emotionally intertwined with the mothers.

Conflict or Continuity?

The primary question around which this article is organized is whether intergenerational feminism in Gitanjali Shree's novels reflects a discontinuous relationship, driven by conflict and rupture, or one that is continuous, underlined by shared memory, inherited trauma, gendered practices, and a traumatic narrative of feminine reproductive labor. The "evidence" of the novels is certainly in favor of the former. Both pairs of younger and older women are shown to inhabit worlds based on different ideals and practices of gender, generations, and nation. The novels depict the younger women as self-consciously activist, relational, dialogic subjects who reject the older women's world characterized as silent, narcissistic, and apolitical. Younger women demand voice where older women are silent, transgression and subversion where the older women uphold the incest taboo, the family bond, the maternal sacrificial role, and the heterosexual imperative.

Conclusion

The novels Mai and Tomb of Sand by Gitanjali Shree highlight the distinctive narrative strategies through which fiction constructs the key concept of intergenerational feminism. In these novels, the central trope of the mother interrelates with the thematic concerns of silence, memory, and resistance.

Shree's novels visualize the intertwining of family history with the broader socio-political history of emancipatory struggles and thus critically comment on national political history from the perspective of Indian women.

The novels foreground the invisible domestic-laboring mother, as well as social and political silencing; in so doing, they mediate changing forms of social oppression in moments of revolutionary change.

Finally, the novels prophesize feminist struggle as a struggle between female kin of different generations and tentatively present that struggle as always in danger of intergenerational failure.

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Conflicts of interest

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