

“When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma” : The Mother- Daughter Relationship in Geetanjali Shree’s *Tomb of Sand*

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ABSTRACT: The paper aims to explore the formation of female identity in a patriarchal society and the different aspects of the mother-daughter relationship that breaks through many fundamental boundaries structured by the society. It is a study that fuses Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Literature. The strong emotional attachment of the mother-daughter relationship goes through various stages such as the development of the sense of self-in-relation, empathy, relational self, body-image, sexuality, jealousy and rivalry. It also helps for the model of future relationships. The first part of the Paper makes a theoretical enquiry into the development of this relationship from the perspective of Feminism and Psychoanalysis. Besides criticizing Freud’s lack of interest in women’s sexuality, the section traces the post-Freudian thoughts about women, mothering and mother-daughter relationship by theorists such as Helene Deutsch, Nancy Chodorow, JV Jordon, JL Surrey, AG Kaplan and JB Miller. The second part, through a close reading of Geetanjali Shree’s 2022 Booker prize winning novel *Tomb of Sand* (translated into English by Daisy Rockwell) traces the complex aspects of mother-daughter relationship and the patriarchal domination of

women in traditional Indian society. The study shows how the daughter in the novel helps the octogenarian mother to find a new rhythm in her life waking from the immobile state of the tomb of sand and in that process, they not only interchange their identities but also lose and rediscover their identities.

KEYWORDS: *Mother-daughter relationship, Sexuality, Self-in-relation, Body-image, Psychoanalysis.*

INTRODUCTION

“Before they were mothers

Leto and Niobe

had been the most

devoted of friends”

From Sappho, “Before they were mothers”.²

A well-known 17th century English proverb tells that your son is your son till he gets him a wife, but a daughter remains your daughter throughout her life. The most influential relationship in a woman’s life is the mother-daughter bond. Often serving as the child’s primary caretaker, the mother serves as the daughter’s primary object of identification and role model, sometimes for the rest of her life. In addition to growing psychological independence and autonomy, there may be aspects of fusion or intense emotions of attachment, connection, and mutuality as part of the maturing process. The paper deals with the complexities in the relationship between the mother and the daughter and the transformation of identities. Famous American poet and essayist Adrienne Rich considers that the great unwritten tale between the mother and the daughter is the emotional involvement or the cathexis. Nothing in human nature is likely more charged than the energy exchange between two physically similar bodies, one of which has toiled to give birth to the other while the other has

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lain in amniotic bliss inside the other. She views motherhood as an institution of patriarchy, a female experience influenced by the norms and expectations of men:

All human life on the planet is born of woman. The one unifying, incontrovertible experience shared by all women and men is that months-long period we spent unfolding inside a woman’s body Most of us first knew love and disappointment, power and tenderness, in the person of a woman. (11)

In the chapter “Motherhood and Daughterhood” that forms the core of her book, Rich argues that the knowledge that is shared between mother and daughter is “a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, pre-verbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other” (236). There is also desire that unites them – “desire to become purged once and for all of our mother’s bondage, to become individuated and free” (236). This strong relationship is “minimized and trivialized in the annals of patriarchy”. Rich mentions *King Lear* (a celebrated play dealing with the Father– Daughter conflicts); *Hamlet* and *Oedipus* (both discussing the complex relationship between mother and son) and points out “no presently enduring recognition of mother-daughter passion and rapture” (237). In her polemical book, she also mentions of Eleusinian rituals, which declared that a mother’s power could “undo rape and bring her (daughter) back from the dead” and celebrated the reunion of mother and daughter. In light of the above theory, my present paper aims at the exploration of the many facets of the mother-daughter relationship – the intimacy and distance, personal and universal, its specific and unique characteristics by focusing on Geetanjali Shree’s *Tomb of Sands*. The paper explores how the novelist uses the mother-daughter bond to comment on the broader themes of identity, memory and the cultural change. The daughter helps the mother reclaiming her identity by supporting her to venture

into an unconventional journey across the country. The journey of the mother can also be interpreted as an exploration of her self – breaking down previously unexplored barriers and opening new doorways. The daughter – an independent, modern woman tries to make the mother open-minded and free like her. By citing examples from the text, the paper shows how the relationship between Ma and Beti is about losing and discovering identities.

MAJOR STREAMS OF PSYCHOANALYTIC AND DEVELOPMENTAL THEORISTS

In psychoanalytic theory it is generally believed that compared to father-son, mother-son, or father-daughter partnerships, the mother-daughter relationship is more complex and troublesome. About women and about mother-daughter relationships, we have four major streams of psychoanalytic and developmental theorists based on the historical background of their era:

The First group of theorists follows the traditional Freudian theories on the psychology and development of women. It includes Helene Deutsch's argument that mother-daughter bonds are detrimental to daughters' normal growth to adulthood.

The second group of theorists asserted that they were vehemently against Freud and frequently rejected psychoanalysis. They continued to hold some of the most derogatory, frequently self-deprecating, and blame-based opinions about mothers, women, and mother-daughter relationships and considered motherhood as a means of domination of women by the patriarchy. Major theorists include Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Friday.

While maintaining their identities as psychoanalysts, the third group of theorists – best represented by Nancy Chodorow, and the fourth group, best represented by Jean Baker Miller and her colleagues at The Stone Center – challenge conventional theories regarding female development, mothering, and mother-

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daughter relationships. In addition to incorporating perspectives on women and their development mostly from interpersonal or object relations theorists, both recognize the significance of early psychoanalytic challenges to Freud’s beliefs regarding women. The primary distinction between these two schools is that, although the third group maintains ideas and terminology from conventional conceptions of development and psychoanalysis, such as drive theory, the Oedipal complex, the significance of the pre-Oedipal period, and the notion that autonomy and separation-individuation are key indicators of healthy adult development, the fourth group virtually completely rejects traditional psychoanalytic and Western developmental terminology and theory, particularly the idea that autonomy, separation-individuation, and detachment from primary relationships are necessary for the development of the adult self and healthy maturation.

WOMEN AND MOTHER–DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP: SIGMUND FREUD AND HELENE DEUTSCH

Although Freud freely acknowledged that he did not know much about women, his theories on female development are still quite prominent today and have influenced cultural stereotypes and jokes about them, such as “penis envy”³ and “castrating women”.⁴ In Freud’s theories a “sense of inferiority was attributed to the woman because of her [alleged] envy for the penis” (212). During Freud’s time, Vienna’s (and Central Europe’s) anti-Semitic, anti-feminist, and racist sentiments viewed the circumcised penis of the male Jew and the “truncated penis” or clitoris of all women as “defective” sexual organs.

In a series of papers published between 1925 and 1933, Helene Deutsch embraced and developed Freud’s views regarding women. Her work culminated in a very influential two-volume book titled *The Psychology of Women* (1944, 1945). Deutsch

wrote extensively about narcissism, masochism, and passivity, which she believed to be the biologically based basic aspects of the feminine psyche. Deutsch also addressed the issues of women who took on “masculine” roles and denied their feminine position “as servant of the species”. According to Deutsch, the girl’s ability to grow up in a healthy way was hampered by her devotion to her mother (but not to her father) during pre-puberty; “the condition of ‘psychic infantilism’ found in many adult women represents the outcome of an unresolved attachment to the mother during pre-puberty” (9). Although several of the early psychoanalysts strongly disagreed with the traditional Freudian views of women, society suppressed these views, and it was not until the second feminist wave of the 1970s that mainstream psychoanalysis was ready to listen to them.

REJECTING CONVENTIONAL PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY AND MAINTAINING ANTAGONISM TOWARD MOTHERHOOD

According to theorists like Dorothy Dinnerstein, Jane Flax, and Nancy Friday, the early feminist movement’s prevailing position was a strong dislike and criticism of Freudian theory. It was believed that political, economic, cultural, and social elements of patriarchal society were the cause of women’s oppression. Until the 1970s, the narrowly defined role of women as primarily an asexual caregiver and an all-powerful, exclusive mother resulted in both an idealized view of the ideal mother – one who is selfless, devoted, and giving – and a tendency to blame the imperfect mother for all that is wrong with society, with the way her children turned out, and in particular with her daughters and their limitations. Paradoxically, many early feminists shared the traditional Freudian viewpoint of Helene Deutsch and other early feminists who sought to challenge the dominant social

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constraints on women's roles to motherhood by viewing mothers as detrimental to their daughters' normal development. Early feminists generally held the views, to use the phrase by Nancy Chodorow, that “mothers are the agents of their daughters' oppression” and “women's mothering is perhaps the central feature in the reproduction of gender inequality” (*Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* 81). Nancy Friday emphasizes mother blaming in her work and Dinnerstein considers that mothers are both victims and carriers of patriarchal culture.

The majority of modern feminist publications, particularly since the 1990s, have highlighted the benefits of mothering (and parenting), pointing out that while some women may decide not to have children, many women aspire to become mothers and find motherhood to be a joyful and transformational experience. The discussion now centres on how to best balance and integrate motherhood with work, other relationships, and personal needs; whether or not to shift child-rearing responsibilities from the nuclear family or the isolated mother to the larger society; and whether or not a more egalitarian family structure is necessary, with fathers bearing a far larger share of the burden than has traditionally and even now existed.

CHANGES TO CONVENTIONAL PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

Some of the most profound and intricate theoretical psychoanalytically oriented books on gender and motherhood have been produced by anthropologist, sociologist, feminist, and psychotherapist Nancy Chodorow. Her seminal work *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1999) has influenced both intrapsychic and interpersonal attitudes in the general public about mothering and the reproduction of mothering through female growth. Chodorow

questions and criticizes conventional psychoanalytic theories, but instead of completely discarding them, she rethinks and alters them with a focus on object connections. In her reformulation of classic Oedipal theory, Chodorow emphasizes the significance of the pre-Oedipal phase in the formation of a sexual body-ego and gender identity. According to Chodorow, girls' growth (as opposed to boys') and their ability to parent, especially mothering, are predicated on radically different experiences, responses, and demands with regard to their mother. These differences "cut off or curtail relational possibilities for parenting in boys, and keep them open and extend them in girls" (*The Reproduction of Mothering* 91). She contends that specific issues in female development, including separation and individuation, as well as ego and body-ego boundary confusion, are caused by the unique bond between mothers and daughters throughout the pre-Oedipal stages. As she states "A girl does not simply identify with her mother or want to be like her mother. Rather, mother and daughter maintain elements of their primary relationship which means they will feel alike in fundamental ways" (110).

According to Chodorow, women are more likely to identify with others, have a more robust fantasy life, are more intuitive and observant, and have a less strict and punishing superego that is more susceptible to influence from others. These are the presumptions of classic psychoanalytic beliefs. She concludes that women's role as mothers and the ways in which mothers create what Chodorow refers to as asymmetries in the relational experiences of boys and girls are the reasons for the inequalities between males and females. In order to prepare for involvement in the public realm, these distinctions cause men to define themselves as distinct from others, have strict ego borders, and repress and deny connections and interactions. In the private realm of the family, women are more capable and dedicated to the roles of

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wife and mother because they perceive and identify themselves as continuous with and connected to others, with fluid and porous ego boundaries. In her most recent works, Chodorow expands on her belief that the mother-daughter bond is incredibly potent and “contributes in profound ways to the creation and experience of self” (vii). Chodorow has become interested in focusing, from a more clinical perspective, on the special mother-daughter relationship, where subjective meanings and unconscious fantasies influence the experiences of the mother, daughter, and other mutually constructed relationships, rather than pursuing theories that are more universalizing or generalizing.

SELF-IN-RELATION OR THE INTEGRATION OF ATTACHMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH AUTONOMY: NEW APPROACHES TO FEMALE PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORIES

In her 1973 book *Psychoanalysis and Women*, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Jean Baker Miller questioned traditional psychoanalytic theories of women’s deficiency and defectiveness and instead offered fresh perspectives on female development that recognized and celebrated women’s strengths. Miller brought up the issue of women’s historical undervaluation in respect to the particular subject of mother-daughter relationships. Women were perceived as having limited and constrained societal responsibilities, existing only to serve others, particularly males and children, and mothers were seen as a threat to their daughters (and sons). According to Miller, these representations of mothers and women influenced a daughter’s conflict and distance from “the most significant person in her life who is also the figure from whom she builds an image of herself as a feminine being” (392).

Miller and a number of other professionals with training in psychoanalysis founded The Stone Center at Wellesley College

to create a new psychological theory of women. The growth of “self-in-relation” and the growing ability for relationships to become more complex, as well as for mutuality and empathy, are the simple core of the developing idea of this school. As opposed to Chodorow, whose articulate and scholarly analysis of how women become mothers and whose modifications of classical psychoanalytic theories are rooted in object relations theory, the Stone Center theorists accept that object relations theorists recognize the power of relationships, but they disagree with the fact that they retain the language of drive theory and destructive impulses and show relationships as secondary to the satisfaction and frustration of drives. According to a number of Stone Center theorists, the mother-daughter bond served as the blueprint for future relationships. These include Irene Stiver, who argued against the idea of the Oedipus complex for female development, Jordan, Surrey, and Kaplan on women’s development of empathy, Janet Surrey on relational self’s growth, Jean Baker Miller on women’s development of the sense of self-in-relation, and Kaplan and Klein on the relational self in late adolescent women.

Classical psychoanalytic theories of female oedipal tendencies are thoroughly contested by Irene Stiver. The concept that most girls turn away from their moms is not supported by any systematic clinical or academic investigations, according to Stiver. Rather, research shows that girls have different attachments to their fathers than to their mothers from a very young age, that women have different but equal superegos, that girls continue to feel passionately throughout their latency years, and that current research on female sexual function does not distinguish between vaginal and clitoral orgasms. She believes that castration anxiety and penis envy, where fear and jealousy are the motivating factors, are inferior to the self-in-relation paradigm, which emphasizes reciprocal empathy and empowerment. According to Stiver,

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adult women in psychotherapy are likely to criticize their moms, highlight her flaws, and fight to avoid being like her. According to her, these women have close and frequently difficult ties with their mothers. According to Lewis and Herman’s theory, which Stiver quotes, daughters’ understanding of how their fathers’ attitudes and actions devalue and demean their moms is the main cause of their rage and lack of empathy for them. Additionally, the daughter connects with the aggressor because she is angry that the mother did not fight harder against this devaluation.

Studies on women’s self-development in late adolescence have been written by Kaplan, Gleason, and Klein. They point out that psychological growth is associated with greater autonomy, independence, separation, and competitive achievement according to conventional developmental and psychoanalytic views. Women’s sense of self emerges by internalization of experiences of increasingly complicated relationships characterized by empathy, reciprocal identification, and care for preserving the relationship rather than through separation. According to Jordan et al., “conflict is a necessary part of relationships, essential for the changes that must be made so that the relationship and each person in it can change and grow” (125).

THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP IN *TOMB OF SAND*

Ek muddat se teri yaad bhi aayi na hamen,
aur ham bhul gae hon tujhe aisa bhi nahin.
(I have not thought of you for ages,
but it’s not as though I’ve forgotten you either.)
Firaq Gorakhpuri.⁵

Geetanjali Shree’s 2018 Hindi novel *Ret Samadhi* (translated in English by Daisy Rockwell in 2022 as *Tomb of Sand*) tells the

narratives of Indian women who have struggled for their freedom and liberty in the society which has been dominated by patriarchal ideals. The mother-daughter relationships form the core of the novel and show the challenges and complications that women face in their daily lives in an Indian society. It describes how Indian women have broken free from their traditional practices and started to struggle for their rights in society. The story, divided into three parts, tells the tale of Ma, an 80-year-old woman who, after her husband's death, recovers from a deep withdrawal from life, only to discard the life she had led up until that point and pursue a new path with new vigour and energy with the help of her daughter, referred to in the novel as Beti. At the very beginning of the novel, Shree tells us the story in an evocative manner:

Two women: one mother, one daughter, one growing downwards, the other growing upwards. One laughs and says, I'm growing smaller by the day! The other is saddened, but says nothing when she sees herself growing bigger. (12)

“CHARHI JAVANI DADI NU” : THE OCTOGENARIAN MA

Set in a North Indian city in contemporary times, the novel begins with Ma lying on her bed with her back turned to the doorway in such a profound condition of seclusion that her family members are unable to interact with her. She was always looking at the wall with her back to the doors and in that manner, her back became a wall itself. It was certainly the result of the death of her husband whose “presence was still felt, even in death” (15). In the poignant description of the novelist:

She was a bundle, shrinking ever more from moment to moment, sending out a scrambled signal from within her vast quilt that she was still in there somewhere. The bundle scrunched-up on one side, then slid up a bit, then down, then over there. Was

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she testing to see how far she could spread herself? Or was she just turning her face away, turning her back on her children and grandchildren, and in the process dragging herself towards the wall to press against it with all her few-years-shy-of-eighty might to see if she could slip into it entirely? (15-16)

The wall has become a symbol of her confinement in a traditional male-dominated society. Living at the house of her civil-servant son, she was mechanically repeating the phrases—“No, now I won’t get up”—at the coax and cajole of the family members. But that bundle of quilt in bed had its own hidden desires and ripples: “The noes of the dying hold their own secrets. Their own dreams” (23). At the arrival of the daughter, the desires find their wings: “Every time Bede’s sister pauses in this pose at his door, the thought flashes through her mind – have I been acting until now, or am I just about to start?” (32). Regarding the octogenarian Ma, the author says in an Interview:

Ret Samadhi—Tomb of Sand—was triggered by an image, the quite mundane image of an old woman lying always in bed with her face to the wall and back to the world. Once the image planted itself in my mind it began to stir my interest and curiosity more and more. Whatever could be going on in the old woman’s head? Had she turned away from her family and life and was awaiting her end? Or, when she looked like she was trying to bury herself alive into the wall by creeping up closer to it, she was actually thinking of the world on the other side and burrowing a hole through the wall to emerge on that side and reinvent herself? That is how the novel began—the tale telling itself—and as I shadowed the old woman, she started taking the initiative, shaping up as the woman all set to embark on a new life and doing the wonderful things she did. (Shree)

BADE – THE OPINIONATED SON

When Geetanjali Shree depicts the interactions between Bade and Beti, she satirically explains how ordinary Indian men yell and speak to women in an oblique manner by pointing out that he shouts loudly when he sees her. Shouting is a tradition that has been practiced for thousands of years by the oldest sons. This illustrates how patriarchy and the underlying male oppression it entails have longstanding historical roots and have persisted for many decades. Although Bade's true mood never reached a boiling point, it is believed that Bade's father roared from the heart. The father had yelled until he retired, at which point he passed the yelling to his son and had been rather quiet himself. (46)

A man may bring the bread home, but the woman actually prepares the food with that bread, something that the male chauvinistic society fails to recognize. In addition to the fact that being a homemaker is a full-time job, she is not even respected by others. The narrator points out that although Bahu used to look after Ma, no one ever showed her the respect she deserved, and she felt abandoned for years. Even though she was the essential and vital component that drove the primary wheel of the house, Bahu never felt comfortable in her own husband's home as she says, "My home has never been my own" (205). Nobody, not even the servants, cared about her opinions. For example, when Bade instructs servants to prepare parathas and she instructs them to prepare khichdi, Susheela, the servant, prefers to prepare parathas over khichdi, which is extremely disrespectful and degrading to her because she is the one who makes all of the decisions and manages everything. The typical attitude of the Indian society towards its women is expressed by the novelist in an appropriate way:

Some say this is a new age. Others say that when it comes

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to women, it’s always a new age. New Age. Meaning things have changed for women. (Things always change for women). Women are no longer in the roles they used to be in. (They’re always in new roles). (231)

But at the same time, Shree is very optimistic towards the ability of the women: “And always, at least once, every woman, whether this one or that one, whether small or big, finds herself at the door, one foot poised in the air, like a dancer striking a mudra, a pose, in order to reenter that home or door which she has renounced and already left far behind” (231).

“BITIYA RANI BARI SIYANI”: THE DAUGHTER

The daughter, called Beti in the novel, is ten years younger than the son Bade. Shree describes that “as a child she was made of no” – always doing the opposite what people wanted from her. She wanted to become someone not like her mother – “I’m not you” (52). Although she still resembles her mother, she has developed a distinct personality in addition to maternal femininity. She is presented here as a contrast to her mother. Chodorow’s theory, which contends that the daughter attempts to differentiate herself from her mother out of fear of absorptive loss, can be used to understand it. Beti, the willful and headstrong daughter of Ma who wants to transcend the long-standing patriarchal customs and tries to develop her self-image, is described with tender indulgence by the novelist: “Daughters are made of wind and air. Invisible even in moments of stillness, when only the very sensitive perceive them” (37). The mother wants her daughter’s star to twinkle brightly: “All egotism and success on one side, mother-daughter on the other” (241). The daughter knows her mother more than anyone else in the house. All resistance of the mother vanishes with the skills of her hands: “A path opens with no. Freedom is made of no. No is fun. No is nonsensical. Nonsensical, but also mystical” (52). In

a major departure from societal norms, Ma, the widowed mother who is expected to remain in her son's house, decides to shift to the house of Beti. And it was at Beti's house that Ma embarks on a renewed life with the companionship of Rosie – a transgender who works as a catalyst for the last stage of Ma's journey. Beti is full of love and sympathy for the old mother. Ma comes to Beti's house and out of exhaustion falls asleep instantly and begins to snare softly. Shree expresses the feelings of the passionate daughter: "Poor, bewildered Ma, thought Beti, becoming the mother now. Tears welled up in her eyes" (241). The profound intensity of the mother–daughter bond is emphasized in many places in the text.

Very symbolically the second section of the novel, when Ma came to live with Beti, is titled "Sunlight". It is Beti, the daughter (the light in the life of Ma) enlightens and colours the dark and faded life of Ma. She tries to create Ma according to her self – "This is the door that opens to reveal a world created by Beti alone" (237). The "walls" of Bade's house is replaced with the "doors" of Beti's house. The idea of freedom and openness is hinted at and emphasized at the very first sentence of the section:

The first thing you see when you open the door to Beti's flat is the green belt beyond the balcony at the end of the long open hallway, and above that, the blue canopy of sky. The sight brings peace to closed eyes, and might even inspire them to open. (237)

The open-minded, independent and modern daughter Beti is here the reflection of the traditional Ma – both emotionally and symbolically. Beti is like another self of Ma – one that can continue her existence. This transformation of Ma can be interpreted through Chodorow's idea of "double identification". Chodorow claims that because the mother connects more with her daughter than with her son, she prevents her daughter from being independent and separating from her. The dual identification that comes with mothering is the cause of this strong bond between

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mother and daughter: “A woman identifies with her own mother, and through identification with her child, she (re) experiences herself as a cared-for child” (47). A woman will replicate her own mother’s nurturing of her as a daughter by identifying with both her mother and her daughter. This double identification, according to Chodorow, is gender specific; a woman will feel that her daughter is the kid for whom her mother cared (that is, herself), but she won’t feel the same way about her son, at least not as intensely: “Given that she was a female child and that identification with her mother and mothering are so bound up with being a woman, we might expect a woman’s identification with a girl to be stronger” (47). In Shree’s novel, it is the daughter who tries to shape the mother the way she liked. Beti helps her for sponge baths and vows to “bring her slowly back to life” (241). Together they were having tea on the balcony. Every time Ma gets up to go to the bathroom, Beti is always at the ready. She even sacrifices her meetings with her boyfriend KK while Ma was in her flat. Beti is so engrossed and obsessed with Ma that other people have no place in her world, not even KK. Shree poignantly expresses the coldness of the relationship between Beti and KK after the coming of Ma:

The halting of Beti’s body. When KK sneaks in. A halting that steps away and stands at a distance. KK is pleased. He had run into Rosie and Ma downstairs.

I sent them to go wherever they wanted in my car, there’s no one here, just you and me, and I have the key.

Where? Beti is anxious.

Here. KK pulled her close.

Where is ... Amma...? she asked between his forced kisses... They’re going to a festival by a lake, KK whispers between lustful kisses... His lips felt dry and sticky to Beti. Get back. She pushed him away. Someone will come.

A cat, a mouse, a crow? KK rolled her onto the mat.

Amma...she tried to say.

'Is she hiding in here somewhere? KK's hands are insistent, joking on his tongue.

She is everywhere, Beti's body said, but her voice burst out: Get away, what if she comes back? (425 -26).

This bond between Mother and Daughter gets a new dimension with the coming of Rosie. The introduction of Rosie – the transgender called by Beti as Rosie Bua is described as “barrelling in like a fresh gust of wind” (310). She became a regular visitor to Ma and changed the old woman in a way that is not liked by the unconventional Modern Beti. Ma became more dependent on Rosie than her own daughter. When Beti advised Ma to unwrap the towel from her head, Ma was reluctant to do so saying that Rosie advised her to wrap the hair in a towel for a while to dry it and otherwise the breezes spirit away the nutrients, making the hair dull. Rosie also liberated Ma from “the height-shrinking-daily sari-wearing frustration” to a strange gown-like dress. Beti notices that “Maji” has changed to “Baji” for Rosie. Beti who considers herself liberated, is unprepared for the discomfort she experiences at Rosie's regular visits. Beti is now annoyed to find her Ma a girl on sixteen, and not an old lady going on eighty. Not only the clothing, but also the food habits of Ma got changed, she started taking sips of wine. This suspicious view of the bond between Ma and a transgender by the so called “progressive” daughter shows the middle-class hypocrisy in Indian society. This attitude can also be interpreted from Chodorow's double identification. And here Beti who reshaped the character of Ma after rescuing her from Bade's patriarchal domination looks at Ma's attachment with Rosie with envious eyes.

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“AMMA TRANSFORMS INTO CHILDISHNESS AND BETI INTO MATURITY”: THE REVERSAL OF ROLES

In the house of Beti, the mutual role between Ma and Beti got reversed – Beti became the mother and made Ma her daughter. She is full of sympathy for the old mother and vows to bring her back to life. At the house of Beti, Ma had his beginning of the second life – the old mother of Bede’s house wakes up in Beti’s house as a child and eager to discover the new world. The novelist writes,

Ma lifted her hands in the air as if to embrace the light-soaked dots which caressed her face. She ran her tongue over her lips so she could taste their warmth. Babies are eager to stuff anything into their mouths...But the gaze has no age, and in her gaze twirled a top that set off roaming through this new world. (243 - 44)

“No, I won’t get up” has changed into an emphatic “Yes”. Gradually Ma began to walk on her own and this took Beti to the seventh heaven. The two enjoy watching films together and laughing awkwardly at the Western kissing. Beti also accepts the disturbance of her relationship with KK as she “knew, though perhaps only subconsciously, that a mother and a girl-friend cannot exist in the same body” (273). The intimate-yet-far relationship of Ma and Beti is described by the novelist in an excellent way: “Daughter. You love her. You fear her. Now you see her. Now you don’t” (37).

This reversal of roles in Mother-Daughter relationship is very much akin to the concept of ego-boundary confusion. Referring to the generational recurrence of women’s ego boundary weakness and guilt, Chodorow says,

A mother, on the one hand, grows up without establishing adequate ego boundaries or a fine sense of self. She tends to experience boundary confusion with her daughter, and does not

provide experiences of differentiating ego development for her daughter or encourage the breaking of her daughter's dependence. (59)

The mother in Shree's novel changes the way her daughter wants after she shifts to her flat. The daughter also tries to fulfill Ma's desires sacrificing other relations. But in the course Ma becomes independent and accepts Rosie as her closer companion. When the child sees the mother as distinct and "not me", ego boundaries—a feeling of psychological separation from the outside world—and a bounded body ego—a sense of the body's predictable boundedness and permanence of physical separateness—emerge. This happens as a result of recurrent experiences of the mother's absence as well as physiological maturation. After the death of Rosie, Beti realizes the deep impact Rosie had on Ma. The unseen presence of Rosie annoyed Beti: "Now Beti watches with curiosity: it is as if Ma has turned into Rosie herself. Rosie whispers into Ma's ear: Now turn right, now left, and Ma turns" (569). She notices the loss in her mother which she cannot recompense:

The worm she had become crawled into a corner and died with Rosie. Now Beti was a soft velvety sunshine, spreading out warm like a shawl over Ma to protect her from the coming chill, softly cosying her. (514)

Beti no longer bears the daily transformation of the mother. She accompanied her in Pakistan to give her elderly mother some small shred of happiness in the final stage of life. She discovers that "this woman" "thinks of no one but of herself" (634). She began to miss KK terribly. Her final realization is: "This is not my story, but hers, I have no part in it" (633).

CONCLUSION

Mother-Daughter relationships are both a natural and challenging

“When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma” :

subject of study when it comes to the creation and maintenance of gendered identities in a society. According to Adrienne Rich, it is difficult to accept and strengthen both the mother and the daughter within ourselves. Because patriarchal beliefs have pushed us to divide, polarise these images, and transfer all undesired guilt, wrath, shame, power, and liberation onto “other women”. Modern Indian literature, particularly that of women writers, instead of elevating the mother to the status of superhuman, portraying her as a human person with all of her frailties. Gita Hariharan, Namita Gokhale, Anita Nair, and Manju Kapur are among the new crop of Indian women novelists who highlight the predicament of modern women, particularly their attempts to break free from the matrilineal social structure. Geetanjali Shree’s *Tomb of Sand* is an influential addition to the genre that celebrates women emancipation. Harish Trivedi compares this novel with Nirmal Verma’s *Antim Aranya* (translated into English as *The Last Wilderness*) and Krishna Sobti’s *Samay Sargam* (translated into English as *The Music of Solitude*) in the sense that it has an old woman as its protagonist (Jaipur Literature Festival 00:03:35 - 55).

After her debut novel *Mai*, Shree again comes with a more mature treatment of motherhood after twenty-five years in *Ret Samadhi*. The eighty years old mother had removed all her layers and finally became simply herself untouched by the thoughts and concerns of any other. The common perspective of the family members is that at eighty, Ma had turned selfish. Beti – the daughter finally realizes with a total shock how little they all knew about Ma. It reminds us of Jorge Luis Borges whom Shree refers to more than once: “The world is not fully knowable”. It is interesting to note that Shree chose to refer to the major characters of the novel with their relationship identities rather than any proper names. Perhaps, with this she emphasizes

the idea that our family life really determines our identity and this is all important in our lives. In the last stage of Ma's journey, there is finally the acknowledgement of a sense of identity buried in the sands of time, of rediscovery and of redemption for Ma – a heart which finally decides that it is never too late to follow its own path. Anything worth doing transcends borders, gender, socially sanctioned norms and roles, age-appropriate behavioural conventions, taboos and restrictions that condition and entrap us. What Geetanjali Shree said, in his conversation with Seema Chishti, seems to be an apt conclusion of this paper,

My writing is for humanity and love. You are writing means you believe in people, in the world, and in yourself. Even when you are writing about sorrow, you have the hope that you will overcome that sorrow. (Quint Hindi 00:11:42-55)

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Notes:

1. Shree, Geetanjali. *Tomb of Sand*. Translated by Daisy Rockwell. Penguin Books, 2022, p. 465
2. Greek poet Sappho’s “Before they were mothers” provides a moving analysis of how relationships and identity change as people move through different phases of life. It examines motherhood as a whole and how it affects female friendships. The poem can be accessed at <https://allpoetry.com/Before-They-Were-Mothers>.
3. Prior to being aware of the anatomical differences between girls and boys—specifically, the presence or absence of the penis—Freud believed that young girls and boys were undifferentiated during the pre-Oedipal phase. The girls were believed to have “penis envy”, which is based on Freud’s theory that girls desired to have a penis and either lost it or will grow one.
4. A pivotal moment in the psychoanalytic description of the masculine

subject occurs when the little boy notices that his mother has “no penis”. Even though this is a startling sight, it is not perplexing because the mother is instantly perceived as “castrated,” “mutilated,” and lacking everything that a man without a penis would have. This horror at the sight of the mother’s “mutilation” causes unpleasant castration fear and the sad renunciation of the desire for the mother.

5. Raghupati Sahay (mostly known by his pen name Firaq Gorakhpuri) is referred to by Geetanjali Shree in her novel *Tomb of Sand*. The following couplet is used by Shree at p. 135 in the novel.