

The Silent Wound: Maternal Absence and Emotional Inheritance in Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived*

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Abstract

In Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived*, motherhood is presented in terms of repression, silence and emotional loss, rather than a nurturing or safe space. The paper discusses the issue of parental absence in the text and the psychological impact it has on Myshkin, the child, using a feminist and a psychological perspective of familial and maternal absence as an emotional retreat from life due to patriarchal restrictions, rather than mere physical distance. Gayatri's slow withdrawal from domestic life leaves an ever-expanding emotional chasm in Myshkin that establishes his identity, sense of belonging and emotional security. By using a feminist and psychological perspective, this research unravels the implicit costs associated with patriarchy across generations through the lens of restricting women's individuality as a source of emotional deprivation for children.

Keywords: Maternal absence, motherhood, patriarchy, emotional inheritance, silence.

1. Introduction

Motherhood is often perceived through an ideal lens that associates motherhood with emotional support, care, and consistency. However, modern Indian English literature frequently opposes this idealistic view of motherhood by portraying mothers as individuals who have to endure emotional repression or suffering in their role as mothers.

The prominent theme within '*All the Lives We Never Lived*' is the concept of maternal absence. Gayatri's absence from her family portrays that her son has experienced an environment filled with emotional confusions and a lack of communication. This paper will investigate the manner in which maternal absence demonstrates psychological injury instead of being regarded solely as moral failure. Not only does Roy use examples of maternal withdrawals within her novel to demonstrate the absence of agency, voice, or creative expression granted to mothers by their social constructions; Roy also demonstrates that maternal withdrawals have neither psychological nor social significance.

2. Objectives of this research include:

- 1) To analyze the major theme of maternal absence in Anuradha Roy's novel, "All the Lives We Never Lived"
- 2) To explore the ways in which patriarchal restrictions have contributed to Gayatri's emotional silence and withdrawal
- 3) To evaluate how Myshkin has been psychologically affected by the absence of his mother
- 4) To look at how generations have been emotionally affected by female oppression in a patriarchal society.

3. Review of Literature

The critical reviews of Anuradha Roy's novels tend to revolve around themes of memory, silence, and emotional control. Pramod K. Nayar observes that the modern Indian English novel tends to portray the home as a site of emotional regulation rather than comfort, particularly for women. Feminist scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir contend that motherhood in a patriarchal society requires self-denial and the absence of autonomy, reducing women to roles rather than persons in their entirety.

Elaine Showalter's feminist approach shows us the maternal silence as a societal issue rather than an individual's concern. Studies on motherhood in Indian literature emphasize that women's creative and emotional selves are quite often denied in familial structures. Nevertheless, there has been a lack of critical studies on how maternal denial deeply affects the emotional growth of the child. This paper attempts to fill this gap in the existing literature.

Motherhood in a Patriarchal Society

The idea of motherhood is also linked together with the theme of societal limitations in 'All the Lives We Never Lived'. Gayatri is expected to be submissive, selfless, and emotionally restrained as she loses her identity. Her love for art and creativity is labelled as impractical in a household where there is sameness. The household environment becomes emotionally suffocating rather than nurturing.

Gayatri's emotional detachment is apparent when Myshkin notices that his mother "existed in a world that felt distant from us" (Roy 42). This emotional detachment is not a manifestation of indifference but a result of forced emotional repression. Her marriage further alienates her as her husband's inflexible opinions do not leave much scope for emotional intimacy. Gayatri eventually understands that it is easier to withdraw and remain silent than to speak out. Roy defies the stereotype of the selfless mother and portrays a character whose suffering is often overlooked.

The Absent Mother: Withdrawal as Survival

The gradual process of maternal absence in the novel is quite remarkable. Gayatri does not leave her family abruptly. She gradually withdraws from them. Although she is physically present in her family, she is emotionally absent. This creates a sense of absence even before the final departure of Gayatri. Myshkin remembers, "she spoke less and less, as if words themselves had begun to fail her" (Roy 67). Roy does not show Gayatri as an indifferent or cruel mother. Rather, her withdrawal seems to be a survival tactic in a setting that robs her of her dignity and autonomy. Through the presentation of

maternal absence in this manner, Roy resists the temptation to moralize and instead points to the societal structures that produce maternal absence.

Myshkin and the Experience of Emotional Deprivation

The emotional depth of the novel is expressed through Myshkin, whose childhood is characterized by silence and longing. He feels the absence of his mother's emotional presence, even if he does not comprehend it. His relationship with his mother is characterized more by observation than by emotional connection, and he is left without an emotional foundation. Myshkin reveals that he "grew up with questions that no one answered" (Roy 112).

This absence of emotional support does not result in rebellion but in introspection and quiet longing. Roy explains that children require emotional nurturing as much as they require physical nurturing; without it, they feel a sense of incompleteness all the time. Myshkin's sensitivity and emotional fragility are indicative of the psychological impact of growing up in a setting where emotional expression is restricted.

Emotional Inheritance and Intergenerational Loss

One of the most interesting concepts in the novel is the concept of intergenerational emotional loss. Myshkin not only misses his mother but also inherits the emotional loss that results from his mother's repression. Gayatri's unfulfilled desires and life become a part of her son's emotional experience.

Roy demonstrates how the negative impact of patriarchy is not only suffered by women but also has repercussions on those around them. The denial of Gayatri's individuality is a reason for Myshkin's emotional deterioration, which reveals that gender-related oppression has a devastating effect. The loss of a mother becomes both a personal and a social tragedy.

Silence is a prominent theme in the novel. Gayatri's silence, the family's repression of emotions, and Myshkin's unexpressed sorrow provide the background of unspoken pain. In his recollections of his mother, Myshkin observes, "her absence filled the house more than her presence ever had" (Roy 189). Memory is the only means through which the mother is still present in the son's life. He tries to recreate her presence through pieces of memory rather than through moments they shared together. The most profound pain is often left unspoken, as Roy's subtle narrative voice conveys.

Conclusion

The theme of maternal absence is portrayed in Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived* as an emotional scar that is affected by patriarchal domination. Gayatri's silence and absence bring an emotional distance that impacts Myshkin's emotional development and formation. The novel highlights that when women are not given freedom then the effect of that is suffered by future generation as well.

The theme of maternal absence is both individual and societal. It portrays the hidden effects of a society that values conformity over individuality and duty over real emotions. Finally, Roy suggests that if women are made to live unfulfilled lives, their children will inherit that feeling of incompleteness.

Works Cited

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