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Motherhood and Maternal Legacies: Role of memory in Defining Mother-Daughter Relationship in Namita Gokhale's *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* and Himanjali Sankar's *Mrs. C Remembers*

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Abstract:

This paper delves into the essence of motherhood, examining the legacy of maternal influence on fostering mother-daughter relationships through memory, as explored in Namita Gokhale's *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother* and Himanjali Sankar's *Mrs. C Remembers*. This paper investigates how memory, both collective and individual, shapes maternal bonding and the transfer of emotional, cultural, and psychological legacies across generations. The paper illuminates maternal recollection by conducting a critical comparative literary analysis, which is a crucial factor in shaping intergenerational dynamics. We emphasize that these legacies reflect social and cultural norms. This study employs qualitative analysis of literature, drawing from feminist and psychoanalytical theories. The findings will highlight the sensitive role that maternal memories play in these works.

Keywords: Motherhood, Maternal legacy, Memory, Mother-daughter relationship, Feminist literature.

Introduction

The complex dynamics of mother-daughter relationships have intrigued scholars and writers for years, often serving as a rich area for exploring themes like identity, memory, and legacy. In contemporary Indian literature, Namita Gokhale's *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother* and Himanjali Sankar's *Mrs. C Remembers* provide profound insights into these relationships, particularly through the lens of memory and maternal legacies. These novels examine how cherished and painful memories shape the bonds between mothers and daughters, influencing their identities and perceptions of each other. Namita Gokhale's *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother* and Himanjali Sankar's *Mrs. C Remembers* also show how powerful the mother-daughter relationships are due to memory. Specifically, these stories prominently feature memory, offering insights into the transmission and reclaiming of generational female lines. In *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother*, Gokhale frames his exploration of memory through the lives of three generations of women: the grandmother, the mother, and the granddaughter. The grandmother's memories, which encompass individual grief and the history of civilizations, play a crucial role in shaping not only the individual's personality but also future generations. Gokhale says that memory gives younger women knowledge about their lineage, village, and femme culture, but she also notes that recall is a constraining force. Such memories create expectations for acting according to traditions, which the protagonist, particularly the granddaughter, perceives as oppressive in the context of the ongoing modernization of the world. These memories serve as both a unifying force and a duty, representing the struggle between conservatism and progress. As Takševa (2016) explained it, "The force that the written narration wishes to impose on the reader is an intensified awareness of generational entrapment inherited from oral traditions as practiced through the memories of the grandmother." As a result, memory in this novel serves as a means of maintaining maternal legacies while simultaneously challenging them, as the framework sets the firm emotional and psychological landscape for the younger women to build their relationships with their pasts.

However, the novel challenges the significance of memory in portraying the past in two distinct ways: Himanjali Sankar's *Mrs. C Remembers* challenges a unique approach to the discursive issue of memory. Mrs. In the novel *Mrs. C Remembers*, the main character suffers from Alzheimer's disease, which gradually erodes her memories, forcing her daughter to

communicate with a woman who is losing her identity. Lovingly, Sankar shows how the mother-daughter bond becomes alienated and, at the same time, heightened by this process of erasing. In the novel, the daughter's attempts to assist her husband in communicating with his mother prompt the protagonist to seek answers by reconstructing memories that Mrs. C can no longer recall. Takševa (2016) argues that memory loss is particularly powerful in Sankar because of the way it destabilizes the mother and the daughter's identity, as well as brings into question the means by which memory is constructed and what is recalled. As a result, the novel looks at how even a 'lack of memory', which erases the mother-daughter relationship, is a key component of reshaping that relationship in familial terms.

As a result, memory plays an important role in creating continuity between generations, although it has some implications and conflicts in both novels. In *God, Graves, and Grandmother*, memory undergoes colonization, and the young women inherit a culture that necessitates resistance while simultaneously offering coherence and a sense of rootedness. Likewise, in *Mrs. C Remembers*, Alzheimer's disease deconstructs mother-daughter relationships through forgetting, yet these gates of forgetfulness allow for new interpretations and forgiveness (Gokhale, N., 2001). These works explore how cultural memories of individual and collective pasts contribute to the construction of identity and/or continuity; they also underscore how memories—happy and traumatic—are the bedrocks of the mother-daughter bond.

Both Gokhale and Sankar assert in their discussions that memory is not static, but rather dynamic, subject to change over time, occasionally subject to dispute, and can become lost. The evolution of memory enhances the potential to examine the transmission of maternal lineages and their progression from one generation to the next. According to the ideas elaborated by Henriksson et al. (2023), memory is “an agent that constructs family identities and a relationship between the individual and the collective past” (p. 120). Henriksson et al. (2023) posit that memory, through conscious remembrance and/or forgetfulness, actively shapes and unmakes fragmentary generations, enabling them to manage themselves and their subjectivities by referencing and interpreting, or not, familial histories. Based on the aforementioned analysis, Abel (2021) observes that memory serves as a tangible link between personal experiences and cultural narratives, thereby disrupting and perpetuating mother-daughter relationships.

In these ways, Gokhale and Sankar offer readers diverse perspectives on how people's memories shape not only their own identities but also the bonds that unite families. The phenomenon of memory, including its retention, ownership, and erasure, plays a crucial role in depicting intergenerational relationships, particularly mother-daughter relations, in the novels (Gokhale, N., 2009). In the context at hand, memory is not a passive reminiscence of a certain eventuality; it is a vitality that forms the present and future of the characters represented. In this regard, Gokhale and Sankar provide deep seeds regarding how a mother's memory shapes subsequent generations.

This paper reveals that memory occupies a core position in constructing the mother-daughter relationship, whether through cultural practices from grandmothers or a randomly remembered mother with Alzheimer disease. These novels show that the inheritance of a mother's legacy is a complex process fraught with conflict but also provides characters with the strength needed to manage themselves in relation to family and culture. The present research aims to broaden the comprehension of memory's significance as a crucial element affecting mother-daughter inheritance, emphasizing its use as a thematic and philosophical tool in the writings of Gokhale and Sankar.

1. Theoretical Frameworks on Motherhood and Memory

Literature has addressed motherhood as a subject, drawing on feminist theory, psychoanalysis, and cultural studies. Scholars such as Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born*: Scholars have explored and conceptualised motherhood as both experience and institution from the U.S. Several models, including Motherhood as Experience and Institution (Rich and Born, 1976), exist. Rich examines the uncertainties and even contradictions that are always associated with the maternal position and addressed by literary images of mother-daughter relationships.

Without a doubt, many theoretical frameworks consider memory as a key notion for OWS literary analysis. *Nora* (1996) and *Kritzman* (1996) offer basic knowledge about the critical sociocultural analysis of memory. They address such themes as memory as a social construct that helps to create groups' identities and to preserve the cultures and, therefore, can be useful for the analysis of the concept of maternal inheritance in literature.

2. Mother-Daughter Relationships in Indian Literature

The book features two such studies: Namita Gokhale's *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother* and Himanjali Sankar's *Mrs. C Remembers*, both of which explore how memory shapes mother-daughter bonds. Thus, Gokhale's novel tracks changes across the generations because it focuses on the story of a grandmother; it considers how her memories shape her daughter's and granddaughter's lives (Abel, E. 2021). Sankar's work, *Mrs. C Remembers*, highlights the impact of Alzheimer's disease on memory and identity. The timeliness, particularly of memory loss and the impact of the disease on the relationships within the family, is evident in the novel and in other literary works on dementia (Takševa, 2016).

3. Memory and Maternal Legacies in Literature

Despite its widespread use, the term refers to the transmission of cultures, stories, and attachments from one generation to the next. In literature, there is a general trend to establish a relationship between the concepts of memory and narrative. Books like *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison (Akkache, N. 1987), explore cultural values, personal histories, and emotional bonds across generations. In literature, this theme is often explored through the interplay of memory and storytelling. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (Akkache, N. 1987) is one such work.

This way, the memory work in *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother* serves the purpose of establishing a continuity between the past and the present with regard to the ongoing impact of maternal lineage (Takševa, 2016).

Like *Mrs. C Remembers*, *Kāriko* addresses the question of family memory, the frailty of memory, and the preservation of the mother's memory. Sankar's depiction of Mrs. C and her family reflects the emotional and psychological weight of Alzheimer's disease.

4. Comparative Analysis of Gokhale and Sankar's Works

Comparing *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* and *Mrs. C Remembers* allows to identify similarities and differences between the literary works in terms of representing memory and maternal inheritance. Memory, as the organizers of this conference pointed out, is a major theme

that defines mother-daughter relationships in the two novels, although it is realized in very different ways.

As per Gokhale's novel concepts of collective memory and intergenerational continuity fall under the theoretical framework of collective cultural memory (Abel, E. 2021).

On the other hand, Alzheimer's disease depicted by Sankar claims the loss of memory on maternal bequeathal. Indeed, the attempts that the daughter made in the novel to recreate their history embody the difficulty of keeping family connected if one of them experiences memory loss (Abel, E. 2021).

Discussion

Namita Gokhale's *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother*, as well as child-mother-daughter relationships in Himanjali Sankar's *Mrs. C Remembers*. Both stories revolve around memory as the central axis. Memory appears to play a crucial role in the construction of identities and cultural and familial bequests; however, while both authors address these themes, the cultural, psychological, and emotional perspectives that underlie the two books are different. Each novel portrays memory in diverse ways, illuminating the intricate process of forming and maintaining a maternal legacy, particularly in relation to the memory's impact on individual relationships and future generations.

The story *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother* depicts culture and family through memory, particularly through Gudiya, the main character, and her grandmother Ammi. Gokhale, with strict adherence to mitotic imagery, encodes the promise of passing on past traditions through successive generations, particularly relevant to the tradition of maternal memory. In Ammi, the character undergoes a transformation from a woman singing in a traveling theatrical troupe to a beloved saint, symbolizing strength and determination and thereby ensuring the continuity of the culture. She transfers all her memories, learned knowledge, and life lessons to Gudiya, who then integrates these elements into her own personal development. The rest of the discussion will demonstrate that memory in this context is not merely a passive recollection of past events but rather a proactive force that sustains culture across generations. According to Shrier et al. (2004), memory in *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother* serves as a socio-cultural and psychological tool, preserving organic bonds with roots (p. 32). In this respect, the role that Gudiya plays in the

novel is to link up with her grandmother's past and, therefore, learn her values, which is a way of surviving a changing world.

Ammi provides Gudiya with strength that is reminiscent of the strength retained through memories across generations. Ammi, having succeeded as a singer, transforms into a saint, symbolizing her maternal disposition, strength, and versatility while also portraying the challenges women face in performing their cultural roles in the face of change. Ammi imparts cultural values to Gudiya through her stories, and despite the pressures she faces, she must make sure Gudiya retains the lessons she learns from Asian culture. Mother's memory, which connects the past to the present, shapes Gudiya's identity framework and provides her with experiences of significance and location. According to Jani (2021), Gokhale employs the motif of maternal memory to emphasize the importance of recollection and tradition preservation in the process of building identity (p. 57). Thus, memory serves as a bridge to the past and a guide to the future, assisting Gudiya in understanding her place within the broader cultural and familial framework.

Unlike the character delineation and recollections presented in Ms. Barua's novella, the title of Sankar's work, *Mrs. C Remembers* by Himanjali Sankar, has fragmentation and a psychological underpinning. Sankar's description of memory closely links to the theme of separation and alienation, exemplified by Mrs. C's gradual forgetting of her relationships and self-identity due to Alzheimer's disease. In contrast to the steadfast and unchanging memories that God, Graves, and Grandmother draw on, the memories in *Mrs. C Remembers* are fleeting and not necessarily whole. When this occurs, the relationship between Mrs. C and her daughter deteriorates as the daughter attempts to fill in the gaps in her mother's memory, slowly coming to terms with her mother's memory loss. This novel illustrates how memory serves as both a bridge for connection and a catalyst for division and estrangement within families. Similarly, Jani (2021) argues that *Mrs. C Remembers* is less simplistic in depicting memory because the novel "operates along the psychological as well as the emotional registers of the trauma inherent in transgenerational maternal transmission" (p. 63). The theme establishes the dual nature of memory as a bonding and a dividing force, illustrating how the erasure of historical memory can threaten even the strongest family bonds.

Sankar takes up the matter of memory's psychological and emotional heft in *Mrs. C Remembers* and heightens it with an autobiographical and fragmented approach to the narrative. The novel's narration style appears to fluctuate and blend, mirroring the nature of human memory, especially in the context of Alzheimer's disease. When thinking about Mrs. C and her Alzheimer's progression, there is one very important idea that young people often have to face when their loved ones are dwindling: emotional past due. Such obliteration of memory interferes with the daughter's identity because she can no longer understand who her mother is, at least not the Mrs. C in front of her. In "Mrs. C Remembers," Henriksson et al. (2023) argue that continuity discusses memory as an internal and fleeting system for dealing with familial and individual suffering. From this perspective, Sankar constructs memory as a fluid and relativistic concept that can reproduce and warp family roles and dynamics.

Gokhale and Sankar rightly emphasised the role of memory in building up maternal bequests, despite the drastic depiction of memory in both of these novels. In the case of *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother*, Gudiya's connection to her grandparents' memories provides her with a cultural and emotional state that is beneficial for navigating the contemporary world. However, *Mrs. C Remembers* presents memory as a weak and unreliable power, portraying the daughter in mortal combat with herself while her mother forgets everything. According to Abel (2021), two authors are most concerned with identity as personal reminiscence, as a 'bridge' between individual and collective pasts, or as a bond between present people and past ones (p. 77). While Gokhale has constructed memory as a tangible, state-able entity that can foster continuity between the past and the present, Sankar describes how memory is easily disruptable, shackling, and isolating.

The epistemological approaches of remembering and forgetting, as well as dread and delight, that Gokhale and Sankar incorporated into their novels are evident in their writing styles and associated aesthetic qualities. In Mithilesh Gokhale's *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother*, which is a work of Mithilesh Gokhale, the author uses fable-like narratives that deviate from conventional realism and history of India, telling the tale in the form of folk tales and oral traditions. This technique maintains the centrality of memory in the novel since the majority of cultural practices, as well as Gudiya's identity, originate from her grandmother. On the other hand, Sankar has used shifts in the flow of consciousness and the format of the story of *Mrs. C*

Remembers to map the disrupted and fragile nature of memory in the case of Alzheimer's disease. This feeling of fragmentation is a distillate of features of the Altham family, and thus the episodic structure of the narrative implements them in a way that realistically recreates how memory works and, in particular, how it affects family relationships. Henriksson et al. (2023), arguing in the same vein, stated that the narrative style in *Mrs. C Remembers* reflects the psychological disturbances traceable to memory loss and offers a close-up view of how memory constructs and distorts familial relationships (p. 146). Despite the differences in the cultural and psychological contexts of *Gods, Graves, Grandmother*, and *Mrs. C. Remembers*, both novels under discussion emphasize the crucial role of memory in constructing maternal heritage. Memory is one of the elements that play crucial roles in establishing mother-daughter relationships, both through the preservation of cultural norms and in the breakdowns of individual human recollections. Gokhale and Sankar's novels single out memory as the focal issue, presenting it as the potential for avowal and the locus of dispersal. So, they show that they are looking into the cultural and psychological persistence of the mother figure. They are also interested in the role of memory as a storyteller or, in Marya's case, as a fabricated account of how cultural, emotional, and psychological legacies are passed down from one generation to the next. As both novels demonstrate, memory is an evolving and multifaceted force that binds generations together, carrying forward the legacies of love, sacrifice, trauma, and resilience.

Conclusion

Therefore, memory plays a crucial role in driving the relationships between mothers and daughters in both the novels *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother* by Namita Gokhale and *Mrs. C Remembers* by Himanjali Sankar, acting as the thematic force that mobilizes the past, present, and future. Memory refers to not only the past but also the present as an active part of it that shapes family relationships, culture, and individuality.

In *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother*, Gokhale contextualizes memory as a reservoir of the community's culture and, thereby, authority for the younger generations. In that way, memory yet again constructs Gudiya's life in a transforming world and helps her to identify herself. In this novel, memory represents both power and weight, symbolizing the struggle between liberation and progress. It introduces how memories of mothering leave important imprints to

carry and sustain cultural and family forward. In contrast, Mrs. C. *Remembers* perceives memory as fragile and fragmented, particularly in the context of Alzheimer's disease. Sankar attempts to comprehend how Ginsberg Desai, in *The Nightingale and I*, portrays the gradual erosion of the mother-daughter bond as Mrs. C experiences memory loss. However, in this weakness, memory plays a crucial role in shaping the daughter's character as she attempts to retell or reconstruct their family experience. Indeed, Sankar emphasises that memory loss does not erase the maternal representation but rather reshapes it, providing a valuable insight into the impact of fragile memory.

The two novels show how memory is both a bonding and contestational element in the mother-daughter relationship. Sankar exposes the frailty of memory and its constant oscillations, while Gokhale's roots lie in portraiture and culturally consistent and substantiated memory. However, both authors reveal the continuity of the cumulative maternal heritage and legacy across generations. Ultimately, the core of family relationships lies in memory, both strong and fragile, as it embodies the transmission of love, strength, trauma, and resilience across generations.

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