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Motherhood as the Last Shelter and the Practice of Care Beyond Borders in Bapsi Sidhwa Cracking India and Jhumpa Lahiri The Namesake

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Abstract

Nations collapse. Homes vanish. Mothers endure. Mothers care is the final refuge in Bapsi Sidhwa *Cracking India* and Jhumpa Lahiri *The Namesake*, to the extent that displacement has become survival, rupture continuity and domestic space turned into ethical refuge. The dividing border causes the breakage of families, though the motherly looks develop security: "However, the women had already shut the doors with their children, and no one was able to open it (Sidhwa 95). Diasporic exile comes with less obvious pressures, but this requires emotional work, cultural translation, and silent endurance: "Ashima had not yet learned how to make friends here, and each morning she woke with little panic of her own, the children, and Ashoke (Lahiri 45). Motherhood becomes a radical, ethical practice, which spans past biological or social roles. The exile and its voluntary variant intersect in maternal tactics that hold the memory, maintain the identity and withstand the process of fragmentation. In these writings, care stops being a personal affair but a place of action and repetition. Mothers are the builders of stability, culture memory and carriers of resilience, redefining the territories of home, nation and belonging. This work has a place in the South Asian diaspora and feminist literary studies in terms of focusing maternal labor as a political, emotional, and ethical power, uncovering motherhood as a decisive factor in creating the narratives about survival, memory, and cross-generational identity.

Keywords

Diaspora, Exile, Motherhood, Maternal Care, Partition, South Asian Literature, Ethical Resistance

1. Introduction

When worlds fall mothers suffer. Partition in *Cracking India* by Bapsi Sidhwa is a brutal devastation of houses, but the mothers make out of fear a survival that seeks to become a place of protection. As Sidhwa notices, "women would lock themselves in with children as no one could break the doors" (95). The act is a statement of motherhood as radical protection, and the act which saves life, identity and memory in the chaos of a community. The care, in this case, is no longer sentimental but rather strategic, urgent and ethical.

Exile in *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri is silent but no less aggressive. Ashima conquers her way through "American life as she continues maintaining the Bengali culture to her children: she cooked food quietly, every gesture reminded her of home, every meal was in assurance to her children" (67). The maternal labor is an unseen map of continuity, which inculcates cultural discourse and emotional strength into the patterns of daily life. Diaspora, in con-trast to Partition, does not tear of a person physically, but it dismantles identity, and mothers have to rebuild belonging through perse-

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verance and imagination.

In both writings, motherhood is an authoritative factor as opposed to a social role. The mothers of Sidhwa construct makeshift shelter when violence is looming near them; mothers of Lahiri are steady when displaced emotionally. Both expose the functioning of care outside geography, politics, or circumstance, which creates environments, passes on memory and maintains a sense of familial and cultural identity. Mothers take weakness and turn it into tactic, making it clear that survival cannot be separated with support. Since maternal work in these stories redefines exile and displacement. Domestic spaces are morally moral areas, the place of life, memory and culture merge. Forced and voluntary displacement come together to suggest common resiliency practices: vigilance, improvisation and emotional sustenance.

The mothers in Sidhwa and Lahiri do not simply survive, but they make continuity, re-creating the material and emotional world they inhabit. Making maternal labor radical, active, and ethically-based, these texts help to understand the way literature could render the survival and its other forms so frequently disregarded. Motherhood turns out to be the final refuge, which holds identity, passes the memory, and takes the agency where the political, social, and geographical systems are ineffective. Sidhwa and Lahiri prove that maternal care is not an issue of the background, or passivity, but the architecture of survival in fractured worlds.

2. Theoretical Framework

Motherhood as an act in literature is ethical work, a practice that is relational and conscious and which sustains life and memory in situations of disruption. Feminist ethics of care views care as dynamic, tactical, and ethically effective, instead of passive or pathetic. Joan Tronto stresses that "care involves attention, responsibility, competence and responsiveness, which turn more prosaic actions into practices with a social and ethical repercussion" (Tronto 103). When this lens is applied to the characters of Sidhwa and Lahiri, there are more than nurturing maternal figures, but those who transform the danger, rebuild the identity, and the cultural continuity on the other side of the generations.

The role of memory studies adds to this approach, as they interpret the process of maternal labor as a channel of cultural and historical heritage. The idea of postmemory by Marianne Hirsch emphasizes "the possibilities of experiencing, carrying, and passing the trauma and displacement to the next generations" (Hirsch 22). In diaspora as well as in Partition, motherhood bears histories, which mother may not be able to fully express, but their practices of care instantiate these histories in everyday life - in food, rituals, language, and routine structures. Motherhood, therefore, is a living archive, because identity, morals, and survival are united there.

The literary scholarship on South Asian diaspora has been focused on displacement, nostalgia, and identity crisis, yet it is infrequent to predict that maternal work is a radical and creative power. This paper applies the ethics of care developed by feminists and integrates it with a postmemory theory in order to define maternal figures in Sidhwa and Lahiri as agents of continuity whose work is both affective, political, and ethical. Care is resistance, sustenance, and domestic spaces are transformed into survival places even in the face of communal violence or culture alienation.

This model also sheds light on forced and voluntary exile intersection. The mothers of Sidhwa react to immediate physical dangers, making improvisation of safety and protection, and the mothers of Lahiri have to live decades of emotional and cultural displacement. Although they are in different contexts, the maternal strategies of vigilance, routine, emotional labor are executed on the basis of the same ethical and relational logic that proves the fact that care can be beyond the boundaries of the borders, conditions, and generations. The inclusion of the ethics of care within feminist ethics

and the memory studies therefore offers a conceptually strong tool within the analysis of maternal labor in literature. Sidhwa and Lahiri demonstrate that motherhood is not peripheral or symbolic, rather it is core to existence, continuation and moral protest. Care is the institution wherein identity and memory continue to exist in the fractured worlds and gives us a glimpse into the context of exile, diaspora, and the power of childbirth.

3. Home-Sharing and Emergency Mothering

The partition in Cracking India by Sidhwa breaks not only the communities but the concept of home as well. Female mothers face a short-term and existential danger, turning domestic environments into follies of nurture. Sidhwa explains such urgency when Lenny notices: "The women had knotted their saris beyond the windows, and the children were cuddling close together, and shivering as though even the walls could not restrain the violence" (Sidhwa 121). In this case, maternal behavior is strategic and moral, protecting children first, physically, but also, at the same time, claiming an emotional balance in the situation of communal disorder.

Emergency mothering is not just about protection but it is also about improvisation and negotiation. Women maneuver through random violence, allocation of limited resources and negotiating fear within multiple generations. According to Sidhwa, "they spoke in low tones to each other, acted motionlessly and each movement was meant to accommodate the youngest ones first" (Sidhwa 124). Motherhood labor is a survival calculus in which each action will save the life, memory and a weak feeling of order. Such mothers are also making continuity out of the discontinuity, and they are making sure that the cultural knowledge and ethical responsibility will outlive the discontinuity.

Care practices instill values, memory and resilience even in times of terror. The moment when Ayah is singing and telling children stories, Sidhwa underlines: "Her voice shook, and yet she held every child close by, because she was talking of home, as though it still existed somewhere beyond the walls" (Sidhwa 127). The maternal care in this case is both protective and creative as it establishes symbolic and corporeal spaces in which life and identity continue to exist.

The representation of Sidhwa shows that motherhood is ethical and strategic rather than emotive in nature. Mothers are the designers of survival that makes the most basic actions their means of resistance and memory. Violence as in partition brings home the urgency and necessity of maternal labor: without such interventions continuity, identity, and emotional stability would break down. The strategies of the maternal, of protection, improvisation, emotional mediation illustrate the way that care is going to frame narrative form itself, making mothers important subjects instead of peripheral ones.

In Cracking India, the maternal labor represents the resilience, moral responsibility, and survival. The motherhood preserves the future by negotiating the present peril as the domestic sphere. In these mothers, Sidhwa manages to pin down care as a process of making, producing, and planning which is active, creative and strategic and provides the basis on which one can compare emergency maternal labor to the more subtle endurance found in the diasporic setting.

4. Quiet Exile and Invisible Mothering

Diasporic motherhood in *The Namesake* by Lahiri is the revelation of the subtle, continual, and undetectable labor which is necessary to survive culturally and emotionally. The experience of Ashima depicts how maternal care helps to turn alienation into continuity. According to Lahiri, "Ashima had become accustomed to being anonymous in this city, every meal she cooks was a reminder of home, every action a form of assurance to her kids" (Lahiri 89). In this case, nourishment is not the only measure of care, but rather a conscious

attempt to establish family identity in a new setting.

The exile in the United States does not demand any physical threat, but emotional and cultural pressures. This is necessitated by the mothering of Ashima whose parents are in a continuous negotiation of two worlds between the Bengali traditions and the expectations of the American society. According to Lahiri, "she had furnished the little place in a careful manner, so that not a single corner of the small apartment bore not a trace of Calcutta, of continuity, and belonging, a kind of silent insistence on remembering" (Lahiri 92). Maternal labor can be called a living archive, which custodians the heritage and inculcates cultural identity into the practices of routine, gesture and domestic space.

Emotional mediation is also part of the concept of invisible mothering. The fears of Ashima are kept secret, but they define the qualification of the children on the issue of identity and belonging: "Her concern about Gogol was the unspoken one, a red line she had drawn between the past she remembered and the life she created here" (Lahiri 115). Motherly labor is described by Lahiri as a permanent moral exercise in which care, patience and emotional insight become the survival tools in the diasporic situations. This mild suffering is in sharp contrast to the emergency maternal birth described in Sidhwa. Whereas Partition is an improvisation in the face of an imminent threat, diaspora is a continuum, relation-specific vigilance.

Both forms, nevertheless, go to the same point of using maternal agency as a means of continuity, identity and moral responsibility. Mothers in *The Namesake* prove that the key to surviving the exile is not dramatic heroes but the silent art of things, the architecture of care, its creation of environments, the passing on of memory, and preservation of identity across borders, generations. Domestic spaces in Lahiri turn out to be segment of moral and emotional work, and care is functional and allegorical. The maternal characters create belonging and continuity of culture and make exile an explorable area. Ashima supports identity as well as memory and moral duty through unseen actions of care showing that the role of motherhood in diaspora is dynamic, inventive and strategic and that this, in itself, is a key to the family strength and survival.

5. Shelter Without Territory

The very concept of home is changed by displacement with the force of maternal figures being forced to make shelter with no land. The Bapsi Sidhwa, *Cracking India*, mothers face the violent streets that have rendered their physical space insecure but the care that they offer turns their vulnerability into safety. According to Sidhwa, "she stood in the courtyard with her arms covering the children as the shouts and the stones flew past her and made fear a wall that no one would cross" (130). In this case, safety is not dependent only on the walls or the doors; it is the creation of maternal care and design of the setting, the making of the environment into a temporary refuge.

The same is true of the Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Namesake*, but the challenges these women go through is a little more subtle; they have material homes but in truth, they are culturally and emotionally displaced. Ashima establishes a sense of belonging by performing everyday tasks of care: "Ashima laid out the spices, the utensils, the small mats, every little thing was carefully placed there, a thread of home belonged to her children, a thread of belonging was woven with each action of preparation and service to her children" (95). The maternal labor consequently turns routine household practices into mobile homes, which maintain identity and cultural memory both across time and space.

Motherly care in both stories shows shelter to be an ethical and relational practice, but not a place. The mothers who Sidhwa improvises with are chaos improvisers and the mothers who Lahiri develops continuity with are everyday life improvisers. Although the context is different in the two, they both show that motherhood changes vulnerability to agency, entrenching survival, identity and

resilience in the domestic world. Care itself turns into the building which keeps families united when the walls, borders or nations fall.

In addition to that, maternal shelter transmits memory in generations. In *Cracking India* rituals and stories retain ethical structures even in the face of society falling apart and, in *The Namesake*, routines, meals, and little gestures carry cultural knowledge even in exile. The motherhood, in both texts, asserts that, in fact, motherhood is an act, not a given - made in vigilance, attention, and care. By doing so shelter becomes mobile, ethical, and generative and maternal labor connects to the survival in the fractured worlds as well as to the remembrance.

6. Memory Incorporated by the Mother Body

Mothers in both Partition and diaspora are harbingers of memory and they are vessels of memory and carry with them pasts that survive the displacement and disruption. In *Cracking India* by Sidhwa, mothers play a critical role in making sure that wisdom and moral conduct are passed on to children even during the times of turbulence. Lenny remembers how Ayah shores up culture with the help of storytelling: “She said the old songs of our ancestors, and although she was shaking, her voice, with every word, appeared to put up the walls even more than the locks did” (Sidhwa 134). Care, in this case, involves not only survival but also the passing on of memory and reveals the maternal body as a continuum in itself in a world in flux.

Ashima by Lahiri is a more subtle manifestation of postmemory, which mediates identity by working at home in exile. “Every ritual, food, the careful positioning of domestic items helps to imprint the past upon the life: she could tie the sari folds the way her mother used to show her how to do so...even in oceans, the movements recalled memory” (Lahiri 101). Maternal labor carries cultural heritage through repetitive and attentive actions that make sure that children do not only learn about practices, but a sense of belonging. The memory is performed not narrated.

Maternal body in these texts serves as an ethical responsibility. In Sidhwa, survival is improvised, but at the same time, the traditions and moral systems are preserved by mothers. The slower paces of diaspora in Lahiri require attention in terms of cultural continuity. Though they differ in context, both mothers do memory work, which makes identity and continuity and do so through the care. This memory embodiment links generations also across break. Sidhwa mothers protect children through the Partition, which becomes violent, so that the moral lessons may be preserved even after the children have to face the chaos on the spot. The mothers of Lahiri relay culture through the elements of alienation and inculcate values into routine, gesture, and home activities. Motherly labor, then, is a kind of repository and design, and it serves to uphold the identity of families at times when other structures, like houses, nations, or communities, break down.

Sidhwa and Lahiri indicate through these practices that the concept of motherhood is unimaginable without the provision of memory, which turns the vulnerability into an agency. Labor of the mother becomes the channel with the help of which the continuity of cultural, ethical, and family values is preserved, proving that care is protective, creative, and lasting at the same time. Motherly figure conveys the memory, which mediates rupture and exile and demonstrates that the soul of home is not in walls, but in care.

7. The Ethical Resistance of the Maternal Agency

Motherhood in the displacement and exile contexts is an intentional location of moral opposition, where care is resistance to violence, erasing cultures and alienation. In *Cracking India* by Sidhwa, mothers shield children against physical risks in the short run and at the same time, they exercise moral power. Riots are characterized by “one mother

giving instructions to her children: she hissed, whispering, Stays low, have my hand, and do not answer any one of them - her command cutting safety in the disorder" (Sidhwa 138). In this case, maternal labor is resistant and protective, and it proves that in the conditions of violence, it is the conscious and ethical decision-making that will help to survive.

Ashima by Lahiri plays an even more subtle but no less important role in the diasporic environment. The fact that she carefully observed "Bengali traditions in a foreign setting is a challenge to the erasure of cultures and forms a successor of continuity to the generations that will come after her: To the small apartment, she preserved the traditions of home every night, lit incense and set the space as she recalled Calcutta" (Lahiri 107). Maternal labor is, therefore, an act of subdued rebellion, which makes its presence felt by insisting on identity and preserving values in places where the society fails to do so.

Mothers in both texts turn ordinary activities into ethical activities. The mothers in Sidhwa make safety improvised and maintain the moral teachings amid the sudden acts of violence, whereas the mothers in Lahiri context bury the culture and memory into the daily life, fighting against invisibility and alienation. Care is both survival strategy and ethical intervention, which builds the perception of children and the world and keeps values and identity alive. This agency also serves to show that the process of labor by mothers is political. Mothers in Partition are opposed to the breakdown of social, family order; mothers in diaspora are opposed to the breakdown of cultural memory.

Sidhwa and Lahiri uncover that the labor of the mother, dramatic or understated, gives birth to moral, cultural, and emotional structures that protect the life and identity. Acts of resilience can never happen without the ethics of care, and it demonstrates that motherhood is not an idle position but it is a place of resistance. The portrayal of maternal labor as being strategic, ethical and resistant highlights that it is not only moral foresight and relational vigilance that ensures survival but also physical protection. Mothers, in their daily activities and decisive intervention, are building continuity, memory and resistance, the care is turned into a radical and permanent power that is capable of supporting families across borders, generation and crisis.

8. Conclusion

Motherhood in exile and displacement literature comes out as being radical, ethical, and creative to define survival, identity, and memory within the broken worlds. In the *Cracking India*, by Bapsi Sidhwa, mothers turn the domestic invectures into citadels of safety and protect children on the way into the zone of immediate danger, and save the moral and cultural continuity. Their attention is urgent, strategic, and creative, which proves that survival in the conditions of violence is impossible without the labor of the mother. The labor of motherhood in *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri is expressed in less obvious yet no less significant ways: mundane and ritualized practices and home-like gestures, therefore, make sure that the children do not lose their sense of place and identity even in exile.

In both texts, maternal work is not merely nurturant - an act, ethical and active and formative of the environment, of memory, of the resilience of the environment. Sidhwa mothers improvise when there is the threat whereas Lahiri mothers maintain continuity over years but both of them practice care as a conscious way of resistance and survival. The concept of maternal strategies, dramatic or invisible, shows that care is also an agency that converts the vulnerability into action and puts the identity and memories into the daily life.

With limited references to the previous research, Ariharan makes it clear that maternal labor creates resilience spaces in which memory, care, and action meet (When the Homeland Becomes a Graveyard 45). This observation goes hand in hand with the

comparative reading of Sidhwa and Lahiri: in both instances, mothers are central to rupture and they build ethical, emotional, and cultural structures that endure even in the face of displacement or social disintegration. Their work shows that motherhood in literature is tactical, interpersonal, and productive and constructs the story of survival over generations.

In the end, both Sidhwa and Lahiri demonstrate that the notions of home, safety and identity are not spatial but realized in the form of maternal care. The mother is the bearer of memory, culture, moral duty of her deeds, her ritual, her guard, and showing that care is defensive, creative, and oppositional. This analysis by putting maternal labor at the center of these writings points out the putrefying power of maternal birth - a force that has saved lives, formed belonging and continuation where political, social, and geographic arrangements falter.

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