



## In a quandary concerning Love and Sense of duty: A Psychoanalytical Study of Doshi's *Burnt Sugar*

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### Abstract

This research study explores emotions and struggles of characters in Doshi's *Burnt Sugar*. Psychoanalytical theory has been used to analyze the different aspects of love and sense of duty in the novel in an effort to understand the character's experiences and actions fully. This study sheds lights into the psychological aspects of the characters' decision-making processes and behaviors by elaborating on their needs, wants and perceived threats. Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* unfolds patriarchal environment and focuses on the inner experiences of women searching for an opportunity to be happy and fulfilled. The researchers capture the characters' conflicts and experiences when choosing between pride and affection towards the family, and their responsibilities within their respective societies. This



research study aims at exploring the complexes, instincts, and object relations of these characters using psychoanalytical approach. The results of this research indicate that all the characters are in a double vinculum position whereby they are faced with societal expectations and expectations that we find in a given society in addition to the societal and personal compulsions to fulfill what they desire. The psychoanalytical perspective focuses on such aspects as the characters' anxieties, identity issues, and the need for self-actualization. This research also reveals the character analysis and the use of defense mechanisms, projection, denial, and rationalization among the characters. Thus, the psychoanalysis of Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* gives a profound insight into the psychological nature of the characters and their conflict of affection and obligation. This research is an opportunity to gain invaluable information about the nature of people and how society influences our lives, including such crucial aspects as self-identification, interpersonal relations, and individual desire. Psychoanalysis allows recognizing the underlying causes that control human actions and, therefore, have an increased compassion towards people and their struggles encountered at the everyday life. With regard to the methodology of personality development theory, the researcher examines characters of Tara and Antara and dramatic tensions on their relation as a mother and daughter. This research reveals the shattered motherhood that leads to a change in the socio-cultural. portrayal of mother roles and tremendous influence on the psychological processes of children.

## 1. Introduction

The present research focuses on the nature of mother and daughter commonly depicted in Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* (2020). This research focuses on one of the aspects of Chinese Women marriage known as 'Love and Duty' in the relationship between a mother and daughter. The present research explores the difficult and challenging process with its psychological conflicts, it also looks into

how both the mother and the daughter try to question the traditions of a family and society. Psychological issues are also important to understand the adjustment issues in society (Javaid et al., 2023, 2024) and education (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023; Akram et al., 2020, 2021, 2022). To analyze the difficult process of a mother and daughter and each of their drama, the researcher employs a Psychoanalytic insight. Doshi is a writer of Indian origin but born in New Jersey and currently living in Dubai. Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* (2020) has been listed in the shortlist of the Booker Prize, and is being translated into more than twenty languages in parallel with being an art writer and art curator in India. All the characterizations are interlinked that offer a wonderful imaginary plot. Adding depth to the bird to the story, thus, infusing it with a rich architecture.

The current study deals with Joshi's *Burnt Sugar* (2020) from Psychoanalytic perspective by exploring the personality development formulated by Sigmund Freud, to study the conflicts of society and psychological problems which affects the lives of characters of the novel.

### **1.1 Significance of the study**

English literature, with its rich history and diverse body of work, holds immense importance in broadening our understanding of human experiences and global issues (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024; Ramzan et al., 2023), including ecological concerns (Amjad et al., 2021; Ramzan et al., 2023). Its universality allows it to transcend cultural boundaries, providing a platform to reflect on and respond to pressing environmental questions (Ahmad et al., 2022; Ramzan et al., 2023). This research study discusses some psychoanalytical perspectives concerning Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* (2020) and reveals how the desire and superego operate in relationship to morality and human feelings of love and obligation. Sigmund Freud has opened the path to this study by familiarizing people with

what lies in their subconscious mind and how it determines their behavior and interactions with other people. By focusing on the elements of character psychology, this study reveals and explores the mental states and dispositions of the characters and is highly instructive concerning the nature of the human soul. Therefore, the analysis of *Burnt Sugar* helps one to gain a critical insight into the nature of people, the pressure, which society puts on its members, and the struggle for choice – love or duty. The significance of this research is founded on the need to offer a unique critical engagement on the literature of Doshi by unraveling the psychoanalytic tendencies in his writing and thereby enriching the appreciation of the author in dealing with the core feelings and interpersonal connections. The beneficiaries of this research would be the students of literature and researchers because they will come to know about the relationship of Psychology and fiction. It will enhance their knowledge how fiction could be analyzed from the Psychoanalytic perspective.

### **1.2 Research Objectives**

1. To find out the changes in the psyche of the protagonist.
2. To explore the causes that create a situation that the protagonist to feel divided between love and duty.
3. To highlight the psychological reasons that force the protagonist to take her final decision in favor of duty.

## **2. Literature Review**

The psychoanalytical theory developed by Sigmund Freud and further continued by Erik Erikson focuses on the exploration of human mind and behavior. Indian novels are rich in character and setting descriptions; thus, psychoanalytical theories fit well in analyzing them. This review therefore

examines the earlier works that have employed Freudian and Eriksonian theories to Indian literature pointing to how powerful these theories are in revealing the psychological aspects of the characters and the story.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory focuses on the concept of the unconscious mind, including the id, ego, and superego as well as more components such as repression, projection, and sublimation (Freud, 1923). His psychosexual stages of development and the Oedipus complex have been effectively employed in explaining the behavioral and internal drives of the characters in works of literature.

Indian novels especially those that depict the family social relations can be categorized using Freudian psychoanalysis. For example, in the historical contextualization of psychoanalysis, Bhattacharya (2018) studies the elements of Oedipal conflict in R.K Narayan's *The Guide* and how the principal character's affectionate relations with his mother and latter love interests are replete with unconscious factors. Similarly, Anand's *Untouchable* has undergone repression and sublimation analysis where the opponents of the caste system represented mental drama or psyche (Desai, 2020). Another concept that Freud introduced to the world is the concept of the uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*), which is also present in Indian gothic novel. Singh (2021) goes further explaining how the uncanny is depicted in Ruskin Bond's *A Face in the Dark* to reflect the characters' internal anxieties.

Erik Erikson made a synthesis to Freud which involved personality development across a person's lifespan in Psychosocial stages that consist of an order crises (Erikson, 1950). Out of all the social theories, Erik Erikson's concept of identity crisis and role confusion can be seen to be most relevant when used to study the postcolonial Indian literature. When such identity is threatened or unclear the

crises may be seen with reference to Erikson's theory in such books such as *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie. Kapoor (2019) examines identity confusion or role reversal crisis, as represented by Saleem's quest of the Indian post-colonial personal and national past. Another area in which Erikson's theory is helpful in elucidating intergenerational conflict and cultural Creolization of the diaspora. Analyzing Kumar (2020) on Lahiri's *The Namesake*, it is harmonious with the Erikson's stage of psychosocial crisis intimacy versus isolation, as the protagonist Gogol battles with his two aspects, tradition, and modernity.

It is possible to combine Freudian and Eriksonian psychosocial theories as a complex psychoanalytical key to Indian novels. Adding Freud's early childhood sexuality and unconscious motivation together with Erikson's life cycle theories provides perspective. For instance, in the sample analysis Sharma (2022), he discusses the relationality in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, specifically from such Freudian and Eriksonian lenses concerning repression and identity conflicts, respectively, of Indians.

Thus, the present study has contributed to the understanding of the selected Indian novels through the use of Freud and Eriksonian psychoanalytic theories but there is potential for future research. The integration of the gender, caste, and postcolonial approaches for extending the psychoanalytical discussion is also proposed. Besides, Indian contemporary novels, as such, exploring issues such as schizophrenia and the loneliness of the city offer prospects for elaborating postmodern psychological paradigms together with Freudian and Eriksonian psychological models.

### **3. Research Methodology**

Psychoanalytic theory is the re-creation of person's life. It has been given much importance between the unconscious and thought processes. It emphasizes on

motives. Psychoanalysis examines anxieties and meaning to culture and gives the perspective of cultural formation. Psychoanalytic theory of Freud provides a new approach to the analysis and treatment of abnormal behaviour. Personality development refers to enhance an individual's personality. According to Freud's Psychoanalytic theory of personality development, love and aggression have direct control on our minds and thoughts.

Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* (2020) has been analyzed from the perspective of Psychoanalytic theory of personality development and Erickson's framework would be used in this research. Erickson's model is concerned with how personality and behaviour influenced after birth especially during childhood and also for understanding and for facilitating personal development.

The theory of Erikson establishes on the 'epigenetic principle'. The concept of step-by-step principle relates to the genetic science. In his book "Childhood and Society" Erikson represents the development of ego with internal crises. His theory presents as psychosocial development. The feelings and expectations of child changes by the child in each period of development. Erikson describes adolescence as a period of laziness and negligence versus personal identity creation. But identity never establishes only during adolescence. Erikson expresses that the person who creates the identity continues through his life, but he forms during adolescence. Erikson manifests the base of the theory of development on clinical observations. He describes that the interaction with one's surrounding develops throughout his or her life. Erikson recognizes it as a relationship between the development of one's three variables. These variables contain biological variables, socio environmental impact and experience of the individual as ego process. The main points of psychoanalytic development theories depend on childhood experiences. Erikson describes two opposite features and makes eight turns. Through a different conflict process, the crises of

that turn solve and gains basic feature in every period. Erikson influences by Freud's psychoanalytic theory of development but extends it in two substantial ways. First, Freud focuses on limited to childhood, He declares that the bulk of personality forms around age five (the phallic stage). On the contrary, Erikson develops a life span theory, he theorizes about the nature of personality development as it develops from birth to old age. Second, Freud's theory considers a psychosexual theory of development, emphasizes on the importance of sexual derives while Erikson's theory considers psychosocial, emphasizes on the importance of social and cultural factors across the lifespan. The central concept of Erikson's theory shows balance. Eight tenets of this theory contain two opposite poles, a "positive end" and a "negative end". When an individual engages in the developmental task associates with each tenet, the basic psychological work involves to find a sense of balance between these two poles. Erikson's psychological stages of development focuses on the different crises of successful and complete person.

#### **4. Textual Analysis**

Tara is ignorant in her adolescence. She leaves her home without intending to return her loveless marriage, experiences a short period as a beggar and spends many years to run after a messy and homeless 'Artist' and drags her child with her. Now she starts to forget things, confuses about her maid's salary and leaves the gas open on all night. Her mature daughter faces difficulties with the duty of look after her and provides for the needs of a women who never takes care of her daughter. This story shows the disloyalty and carelessness of mother between the relationship of mother and daughter. Sharp as blade and fastens with caustic wit. This fiction unfolds the treacherous and choking cords of memory and story which ties two women together. It expresses not only emotions but keen self-observation. There is complicated and traumatic relationship between mother and



daughter at the beginning of the novel's description. A story of sentiments and fascination which reveals through the funnel of plot's past events or situations. *Burnt Sugar* is very deep and the powerful voice of Avni Doshi provokes the complex feelings; causes that lead the protagonist to feel dived between love and duty.

Antara the protagonist of this fiction '*Burnt Sugar*' faces numerous difficulties even her own mother (Tara) does not accept her, ignores her, never fulfill her duties as a mother but Antara forgets bad behavior and negligence of her mother. She performs her responsibilities in a well manner. Forgetfulness is the main cause of the mental illness of Antara's mother. Forgetfulness of her mother creates many problems for Antara. Sometimes her mother never recognizes her, forgets about the sweeper girl, gives the salary to her maid twice, talks to herself, leaves home at mid night and many more. These indications show the mental illness of Antara's mother and she prefers to perform her duty as an obedient daughter.

'The reason is simple: my mother is forgetting, and there is nothing I can do about it. There is no way to make her remember the things she has done in the past, no way to baste her in guilt. I used to bring up instances of her cruelty, casually, over tea, and watch her face curve into a frown. Now, she mostly can't recall what I'm talking about; her eyes are distant with perpetual cheer. Anyone witnessing this will touch my hand and whisper: Enough now. She doesn't remember, poor thing. The sympathy she elicits in others gives rise to something acrid in me. I SUSPECTED SOMETHING A year ago, when she began wandering around the house at night. Her maid, Kashta, would call me, frightened. 'Your mother is looking for plastic liners,' Kashta said on one occasion'. (Doshi, 2020, p.1)

In this text, the protagonist of this fiction Antara perceives the main logic or cause of her mother's forgetfulness and there is not anything that shows concern about it. There is not any process through which she recalls different things as she acts in the past and is hopeless to catch her in regret. Often, she (Antara) uses examples to recall her memory but her mother dislikes her. She feels doubtful a year ago when her maid Kashta calls her to inform her mother that her mother is roaming near the house at night. She also tells her that her mother finds plastic bags which uses for the disposal of waste. At that time, Antara explains that maybe she is dreaming but her maid looks doubtful. Because of this, Antara never sleeps at night and thinks that the mental illness of her mother humiliates her. The element of generativity vs. stagnation of Erickson's theory relates with this point. Generativity vs. Stagnation provides the base for social work in middle adulthood. At this stage, people engage themselves insignificant, important, and creative work which promotes positivity in society while those people who do not fulfill their duties experience stagnation. Tara the mother of the protagonist suffers from psychological mental illness and starts to forget things at this stage. She connects with her daughter Antara and forgets all the events from her past even Antara tries to recall the things with examples but in vain. Tara forgets all things at this stage and she experiences stagnation because she connects with some people and shows less interest in self-improvement and productivity.

'She apologizes, says I'm to blame for my mistakes, thanks me and sighs, massaging her temples. Her lips cave in where two teeth are missing at the side of her mouth, and she looks like she has eaten something bitter. I ask my mother who she is speaking to, but she doesn't answer. I glance at the backseat, just in case. In her flat, we drink tea with digestive biscuits because they're Ma's favourite and it's been a hard day. I tell Kashta to make a paste of honey and

ginger for my tickling throat. My mother is wordless as I give these instructions. 'Add some fresh turmeric to that,' she says a moment later. 'Just a sliver the size of a baby's foreskin is enough. 'She presses her thumbnail against the tip of her middle finger when she says this, measuring the exact amount. Then she looks down into her teacup, stirring an elliptical in its firmament.' (Doshi, 2020, pp.8,9)

As per the text, Tara (Ma) remarks about her daughter (Antara). She does not have any concern for the dissimilarities like the habit of nail-biting. Antara remains silent. Her mother says her daughter to forgive her for the blame for her mistakes. Her mother speaks continuously during the journey. She observes the flow and doubt in her mother's voice. Speaking errors and formal expressions reveal doubt but she remains silent. Antara questions her mother whom she is busy in conversation but her mother never responds to her. This shows she murmurs to herself. Both mother and daughter take tea with digestive biscuits at Tara's flat. Antara instructs her maid to mix the paste of honey and ginger for her itching throat. Then her mother speaks adds a small piece of fresh turmeric. She shows the size of the thumbnail to quantify the exact amount. The element of Intimacy vs. Isolation of Erickson's theory relates at this point. An adult or mature person who develops a negative concept of self-experiences feelings of alienation and emotional segregation like Tara. She lives alone in her flat and speaks to herself because of loneliness which causes mental illness. On the other hand, this point also shows the care in the mother and daughter relationship.

'There are photographs of Ma as a young girl with long, difficult hair. She spent hours straightening it every week, lying across an ironing board with her hair between pages of newspaper. Rumors persist of what she was like at fourteen and fifteen, disappearing from school every afternoon to a roadside restaurant off the old Bombay-Pune highway. The dhaba bore a sign that read Punjabi Rasoi. There, she would order a large beer and drink straight from the bottle. From her

school bag, she would dig out a pack of Gold Flake cigarettes and smoke one after the other. Travellers would break at the restaurant, arriving in taxis and scooters, stopping to take a piss or have a meal – foreigners especially, carrying little luggage and almost no money, on their way to the ashram. Ma would introduce herself, get to know them, sometimes catch a ride back into town. Nani believes these unchaperoned days piqued my mother's interest in the ashram, but I wonder if her self-destructiveness was just another symptom of something there all along. It was around then that my mother started wearing white.' (Doshi, 2020, p.36)

In this text, Antara the protagonist of this fiction and daughter of Tara looks at the photographs of her mother as a young girl. At that time when she straightens her hair at the age of 14 or 15. Her mother vanishes from school, visits a roadside restaurant, orders a large beer, and drinks it directly from the bottle. She also smokes the cigarettes of Gold Flake one after the other. When the different passengers stay at the restaurant temporarily, she introduces herself. Sometimes go with them back to the town. Antara's Nani thinks that her solitary days stimulate her interest in the Ashram. But Antara is surprised that her mother's self-destruction reveals the indication of something else in her personality. The element of Identity vs. Role confusion of Erickson's theory relates with this point. This element shows if teenagers accept difficulties, are efficient to keep true in their faiths and principles, and get a powerful feeling of recognition are successful but those who do not conscious about their identity develop an inadequate concept of self and experiences uncertainty. The same is the case with Tara. She does not identify herself and experiences confusion because she wastes her time in other activities. So, the main problem starts from the teenage of Tara and she suffers her whole life because of her Antara's life is also affected. When she joins Ashram, she starts to wear a white Sari which destroys her life like faded photos of her teenage.

‘In the early days, I thought I would never be happy in that strange place. I stayed up all night, huddling in a corner by myself. I could cry without sleep, water or food. The sanyasis tried to coax me, hug me, even scold me from time to time. Kali Mata pinched me and told me not to be ungrateful. I had to eat, drink, sleep, they all said, I had to look after myself, give in to my state of nature. They said I should do it for Baba. They said I should do it for Ma. They didn’t know that when I did close my eyes, I couldn’t place who I was, and that staying awake was the only way I knew the ends of my own body. They gave me a kurta that belonged to Ma, white and worn, frayed at the edges. It smelled like her and I held it through the night. When I lay in bed, I could hear the sounds of the crickets and bats. Their voices echoed as though they were in the room with me. The springs of the mattress hummed under me. The building creaked, and even the ground felt loose, fragile. One wrong step and I would be swallowed up.’ (Doshi, 2020, p.86)

As per the text, When Tara goes to the Ashram with her daughter. Antara does not like this unknown place in the early days. She stays all night gathers herself in the corner of the room. She cries without sleep, water and food. The Sanyasis of Ashram tries to entertain or please her even they show their anger from time to time. Kali Mata tells her, she does not to be unthankful. She shows her interest to eat, drink and sleep to please Baba and her mother. She tries to think when she closes her eyes but nothing inspite of her own body. She receives a kurta that belongs to her Ma, white, worn, and torn from corners. She takes that kurta with her in bed. It gives the smell and feel of her Ma. She wants to escape from this strange place and environment but one wrong step swallows her. The element of Initiative vs. Guilt of Erickson’s theory relates to this text. At this stage, a child achieves goals while interacting with others under the supervision of his parents and the other who fails to get success at this stage develops a feeling

of guilt. In the early days, Antara goes to the Ashram with her mother. At this unknown place, her mother ignores her and she gathers herself in a corner which affects her personality development. Because of her mother's ignorance and negligence Antara faces many problems. Even she does not know about family and the comforts of family. She lives at an unknown place with her mother who leaves her alone with unknown people.

Antara feels her lungs shrinking as they lose air. Antara cries but her voice muffles. She does not remember the nature of torture and suffering. Antara's mother informs her,

“Whatever she wants to do, let her do it in her own home.” (Doshi, 2020, p.103)

Her mother wants to destroy her drawings and she does. Antara's struggle on years of life studies, initial sketches, some drawings which are more than ten years old vanishes in one night. Because of this dangerous incident, Antara is in a state of anger and confusion. She thinks maybe her mother wants to destroy her home and marital home where her daughter feels secure. In this situation, both mother and daughter are in an intense condition which intensifies dementia in the relationship of mother and daughter. The element of Intimacy vs. Isolation relates to this situation. An adult who does not develop positive self-concept experiences feelings of loneliness and emotional isolation. Antara's mother experiences these feelings from her teenage which creates psychological mental illness. On the other hand, Antara suffers from anxiety, depression, and despair because of her mother's mental illness. She feels emotional isolation because she bears all her difficulties and pains alone. This is the reason both mother and daughter experiences intense feelings during the fire incident which creates the reasons to intensify dementia between the relationship of mother and daughter.

‘I believe her until I receive a call in the middle of the night from Ma’s petrified maid. She reports that my mother has taken to wandering again, bewildered, unaware of who she is. Nani’s house seems to be confusing her more. ‘Where am I?’ she often asks. ‘And where is Antara?’ She looks for me and imagines she’s forgotten to pick me up from school. She tries to dress herself and rushes out from the dark corridor into the empty street. There are only the few who make beds on flattened cardboard boxes, and they stretch and scratch and watch her as she disturbs the quiet. Where she goes, there is no distinction between day and night, and the logic of time and age has no sway over her fear.’ (Doshi, 2020, p.170)

As per the text, the mental condition of Antara’s mother becomes worse. Antara receives a phone call from the maid of her mother in the middle of the night. She says that your mother starts to wander again, confused and ignorant of who is she,

“Where am I? She often asks. ‘And where is Antara?’” (Doshi, 2020, p.170)

She assumes that she forgets to pick her daughter up from school. She makes an effort to dress and moves in a hurry from the dark passage into the empty street, where she walks, there is no difference between day and night. The reason of time and age influences her fear. These lines manifest the bad mental condition of Antara’s mother. She imagines her daughter as a school-going child and she forgets her daughter to pick her up from school. This creates problems for Antara because now she lives with her husband and when she comes to know any situation about her mother, she takes tension and depressed. The element of Generativity and Stagnation of Erickson’s theory relates to this situation. An adult who does not acquire his/her task experiences stagnation and shows little interest in self-improvement. This relates with Tara (mother) who wastes her time and in

the end experiences stagnation. She becomes a psychotic patient and never shows her interest in self-improvement.

## 5. Findings and Conclusion

Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* (2020) is about the relationship of mother and daughter. The author expresses not only emotions but keen self-observation. This novel manifest the complex and traumatic relationship between mother and daughter. Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* (2020) is very deep and the powerful voice of Avni Doshi provokes the complex feelings. The protagonist of this fiction Antara faces numerous difficulties from her birth. Her mother never accepts her, ignores her and she does not perform her duties as a mother. When she becomes psychotic patient her daughter (Antara) forgets her mother's negligence and bad behaviour and performs her responsibilities in well manner. Tara (mother) suffers from mental illness and forgets all the things from past. Antara tries to recall the things with examples but in vain. Her mother does not recognize the sweeper girl, requests her daughter to call those friends who died many years ago. Even she calls her daughter liar and forgets later. Tara leaves her daughter in the hands of unknown people when she joins the Ashram. Different incidents reveal the worse mental condition of Antara's mother. Her mother thinks another woman lives with her in the house using her things. Even she feels the presence of Baba in her flat. This shows her critical mental condition. In spite of all these Antara neglects the bad behavior of her mother and prefers to perform her duties as a loyal and obedient daughter. She takes care of her, gives her medicines on time and also goes with her to the doctor. Even when her mother lives alone in her flat. She brings her home and looks after her. If we follow the theory of psychoanalytic by Sigmund Freud, then, at this point a mental development of a girl proceeds from identification to division. A child connects to her mother and later a she becomes young or adult, she realizes that her character is not same as her mother. That's



why Antara shows loyalty and obedience for her mother and performs her duties in a well manner. The emotional journey of characters which produces the sense of insecurity that results in traumatic and psychic experiences. Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* (2020) explores the complications of toxic relationships limited by duty.

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