

Review

Mother Daughter Relationship in Marita Golden's *Long Distance Life*

P. Menakapriya¹ and Dr.R.Dharani²

¹ PhD Scholar (Part time), LRG Govt. Arts College for Women. E-mail: menakapri@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor/English, LRG Govt. Arts College for Women. Cell: 9942354151. E-mail: akilmohanrs@yahoo.co.in

Accepted 7 July 2015

The objective of the paper is to study how mother and daughter are emotionally attached in Marita Golden's *Long Distance Life*. She vividly portrayed Naomi, an ambitious mother and Esther, her daughter. Motherhood created an awkward challenge to African American women under the slave regime. The condition did not permit mothers the opportunity and freedom to take care for their children or execute their biological role as caregivers and mothers to their children, and above all their female children. It had very devastating consequences on the psyche of the women. This paper also focuses the role of a mother in a daughter's life.

Keywords: Mother-daughter, black women, civil war, identity.

Cite This Article As: Menakapriya P, Dharani R (2015). Mother Daughter Relationship in Marita Golden's *Long Distance Life*. Inter. J. Eng. Lit. Cult. 3(7): 199-202

INTRODUCTION

This cathexis between mother and daughter—essential, distorted, misused—is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other. The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the deepest estrangement. (Rich 1986:225)

Young people, with help of family members' relationship, develop a sense of self awareness, pride, and individuality. One of the most significant familial relationships in black women's literature is that exists between mothers and daughters. Mothers and daughters are usually having a closer social, psychic or emotional identification. Sometimes mother and daughter may be the same person. All mothers are daughters and all

daughters are mothers. But mother and daughter are holding totally different positions. Mothers are either idealized or blamed for everything that goes wrong.

In traditional psychoanalytical theory the mother/daughter relationship is mainly discussed from the position of the daughter. By doing this, the daughter is always seen as the subject of the analysis, and the story is told from her perspective, whereas the mother is considered the object and is merely analysed through the eyes of the daughter. The mother's subject perspective is never displayed in relation to her daughter; the mother's point of view is only discussed when she is seeing herself as a daughter in relation to her own mother. Then also, the mother-figure is still discussed from an object perspective. Over the years, there has been a debate on how to display the perspectives of both mothers and daughters.

Daughters form their identity through the relationship and identification with their mother. Thus, the relationship

between mothers and daughters will automatically be more intense and personal than other relationships. Daughters will be more inwardly orientated in family relations, because they are connected to the mother, who is considered the core of family life. The intense and personal relationship between mother and daughter will prepare daughters to mother for themselves.

Mother/Daughter in African American Fiction

In *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), Nancy Chodorow provides a psychological analysis of the female identity derived from the Freudian Oedipus model, although she predominantly relies on object-relations psychology, which is based on the assumption that every individual's psychological life is created in and through personal relationships with others. Chodorow claims that female identity is primarily based on the connection and closeness to the mother and the placement of women in culture is defined by the bonding between mother and daughter (100).

The African American tradition of motherhood centres upon the recognition that mothering, in its concern with the physical and psychological well being of children and its focus upon the empowerment of children, has cultural and political import, value and prominence, and that motherhood, as a consequence, is a site of power for black women.

Background of the novel

Marita Golden's *Long Distance Life* (1989) chronicles seventy years in the life of one Black family's triumphs. In this novel there are two mothers and daughters. Golden sculptured these characters an emotionally bonded. The mothers wanted their daughters to be educated to lead their life successfully. The novel contains a story about young females who are growing into adulthood and are in search of their own self and identity. The story is written from a female perspective and describes the profound influence of the mothers on the lives of the daughters, even when the daughters explicitly refuse to live accordingly the life style of their mothers.

Mother and Daughter

The story began with the central character, Naomi, who wanted to move to Washington D.C. to better her prospects. Her parents were sharecroppers and raised tobacco. They had four children and all of them were trained to work in the land from their childhood. Beatrice, the mother had some education. Though she struggled in the farm and did wash for white families, she wanted their

children to be educated. Whenever she found time she would teach them the letters to write. In the words of Naomi, "...she was all the time tutoring us and teaching the ABC's and such"(28). But Naomi was not interested to study. Soon after her marriage, she felt bored in her life. But her mother told, "...go on back to your house and your husband.... You'd be surprised how a little love can go a long way" (32).

Naomi was always guided by her mother. After the death of the baby, she planned to move towards North. On the day her mother handed over a pile of coins and paper money which she was "...making over the years, setting aside for the worst times and the special times" (33). She blessed Naomi to get settled up in North. At first she worked as a servant to a white family. When she entered into gambling, she earned a lot of money and owned a house. Her parents were proud of her and her brother Jackson stayed with her.

Daughters as Mother

After Naomi's marriage with Rayford Johnson, a school teacher, she gave birth to Esther. She "...wanted her to have everything I never did... I couldn't raise her to be useless. I trained her to help me...she'd go to Spring Hope for a few weeks and help Mama and Daddy on the farm, same way I did" (50). Rayford died early in the novel leaving Naomi alone to bring up their daughter. As a young woman unmotivated to achieve as her mother has, "...she asked the Lord to allow Naomi to let her go, to free her from the cloistered existence Naomi forced on her daughter like an inappropriate, unwanted gift" (57).

Motherhood affects women's identities and a woman's identity is shaped by her previous relationship to a mother. Naomi shaped a world that was incredible and expectant for Esther because she was the daughter of Naomi's dream. She wanted her daughter to be educated but she dropped out of Howard University where she disliked the attitudes and behaviour of the Black elite. Because she had the view that education is the one thing that nobody can take away. She used to get jealous of Rayford sometimes when he talked about things and using different words. "And I wanted that for Esther, since I'd never known it, that real love for learning" (83).

Naomi imagined Esther to be a teacher like her father. But she dared not to tell or dream the same to her daughter. She tried to teach her to love herself than any man. She always watched her too close. "May be I drove her, in the end, to discover what I was afraid for her to find out" (102). She was surprised when she found out that Esther fell in love with a married man. When she asked her daughter, she replied, "It's none of your business" (104). Naomi hit her and told, "You are my business. You are my child. Don't ever tell me you not my business"(104). She wanted her daughter not to get hurt.

Despite of her warning, Esther and Randolph continued their relationship.

Esther became pregnant and “She thought of how Naomi had loved her – strongly, possessively – and how that love had stoked and quenched her spirit. And Esther promised to love her child as though he belonged to himself, to love him as her echo, not her shadow”(113). She realized how she hurt her mother:

“Mama, I’m sorry. I know you wanted something different from me. Something better than this.”

“Don’t matter what I wanted. It matters what you think you got to have.” Naomi pursed her lips at the lie so hard she produced a warm silver of blood on her bottom lip (114).

Naomi was a self-made woman who didn’t allow her daughter to be hurt by her words. Esther gave birth to Logan. He was a brilliant boy and excelled in school. Naomi sensed that her daughter discontent and need of a new life or a new man. Esther was inarticulate with grief, mute with despair. She worried that her daughter was married to the man she loved. Esther felt loneliness, constricted and nobody loved her. When Naomi soothed her by saying she loves her, Esther replied, “But right now I can’t feel anybody’s love, no matter how much it is. There’s something inside me keeping it out. Driving it away” (137). The mother/daughter relationship is influenced by social and cultural backgrounds in different ways. This influences the development of identity and self-determination of the protagonists.

Esther found herself detached in life and her thirst for something more. When she fled to the South, Naomi came to know her daughter’s spirit was restless and searching and hungrier for life than she ever had been. Though Esther abandoned her son and lover, she took part in Civil rights movement and registered voters, marched, demonstrated, risked her life and went to jail for her efforts. The Civil Rights Movement played an important role in her development, and her participation and experiences in the South saved her from the brink of insanity.

Even after Esther left the house, Naomi felt that Esther was safer than she had ever been. Also she was proud of her daughter, “She just want to make a better world” (162). She hoped that Esther went to the South because she believed in second chances in her life. During Esther’s absence, Randolph and Logan formed a loving relationship. It made the reader to think of a woman’s role as a mother. Logan was hurt by his mother’s absence. But he respects her as a courageous woman. Randolph also understood Esther’s valour and granted her the respect she deserves. When Esther returned, she had only a Bible and a diary which symbolized the power of the word and her self-discovery respectively.

Daughters need mothers’ guidance and support in all

the stages of life even after becoming a mother. The mother is playing a vital role when the daughter becomes a woman. The mother will guide her daughter about the joy of having a family and about love. When she said “Mama, I’m home” (186), it depicted that she was in touch with her innermost feelings, like Golden did in the final section of *Migrations of the Heart*. Logan was not ready to accept her mother at first. The below conversation shows the mother’s affection even during her absence:

...I’m not gonna ask you no whole about what you see and did down there, I can look after at your face and get my answer. I just want you to know I was always praying and I was proud of you. I don’t know, if I could’ve done what you did.

Mama, you had no road map when you left down there and came up here and you found your way pretty good. I learned to read signs by watching you (187).

Golden intensely represented the love relationship between mother and daughter through this talk. A daughter is forming her own characteristics of her mother from how she had reacted for certain matter.

Sometimes mothers misunderstood their daughters’ behaviour. When she realizes her daughter’s character, there is a renovation taking place between them. Esther found happiness and peace again in Randolph, who was now ready to give Esther and their son, Logan, a home. Naomi sensed happiness inside of the news about her daughter’s pregnancy.

She knew that since I’m her mama, ... I’d find a way to understand. I think me raising Esther ... gave us something deeper than just being mother and daughter. I had to be her mama, her daddy and, yes, even her friend sometimes. And that girl witnessed more of my mistakes and sorrows up close than anybody except Rayford.... All flowers don’t grow at the same speed beneath the same sun. Esther bloomed when she was ready. I’m just glad I never stopped tilling the soil. (205)

They all lived as a complete family. Shortly before their wedding day, Randolph died of heart attack. Through the death of Rayford and Randolph, Golden presented how the absence of husband and father disturbed the lives of women and children.

Esther took too much care for her younger son, Nathaniel. Due to her too much concern, he became vulnerable. Whenever he did some brave acts, Esther and Naomi reminded of his father. He lacked Logan’s single-mindedness, mastering subjects in school with ease. As he was making poor grades, he dropped out

from school. He didn't want to inherit or accept the world his mother and brother longed to bequeath him. He involved in drug dealing and died of it. The death of Nathaniel made the whole family struck.

Golden expressed the ideas of Anna Julia Cooper through her women characters, who served as "the generative source, or 'root' of the race" (Cooper 1892:31). Both Naomi and Esther are catalysts for the emotional development of the men. The novel started and ended with Naomi. The murder of Nathaniel echoed the pain of Logan, the hurt and self-doubt driving Esther crazy, wondering what she did wrong. Yet Naomi's voice was hopeful. Naomi was optimistic that they would be able to assimilate the lessons of their parents and grandparents which would be the vein for their success. At the end of the novel Golden suggested that "We each had a destiny" (324) and we need spirituality to survive, to keep us in touch with reality.

CONCLUSION

Golden's mother and daughter in this novel at first fail to nurture their relationship. When the daughter became as a mother to her siblings, she understood the motherhood, love and care of a mother on a child. At once they felt sorry for their behaviour towards their mother. The relationship between mother and daughter cannot be separated. Their relationship is emotional, eternal, responsive, friendly, etc. The mothers and daughters in *The Edge of Heaven* is shown in the fact that the daughters represent a newer generation, who wants to create stories for themselves.

REFERENCES

- Chodorow, N. (1978). *The Reproduction of Mothering – Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. London: University of California Press.
- Cooper, Anna Julia. (1892). *A Voice from the South by a Woman of the South*. Xenia: Aldine.
- Golden, Marita. (2006). *Long Distance Life*. New York: Doubleday & Company Inc.,
- Nelson, Emmanuel S, ed. (1999). *Contemporary African American Novelists: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Page, Yolanda Williams, ed. (2007). *Encyclopedia of African American Women Writers*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Rich, Adrienne. (1986). *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Norton.
- Sidoti, Jill. (15 Oct. 1989). Review of *Long Distance Life*. *Booklist*: 426.
- Tucker, Debbie. (1 Oct. 1989). Review of *LongDistance Life*. *Library Journal*: 114.
- Warren, Nagueyalti. (1990). Reviews. *Black American Literature Forum* 24.4: 803.