



Parenthood Experiences Beyond Nations: Crisis and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This article is to emphasize the bond of parenthood which is celebrated across nations. When a child gets adopted, it suffers from a curiosity to know its parentage and its origin. The parents also make an effort to combine with their baby as if it is their own. Some succeeds in adopting the baby across nations. But there is an obvious barrier of colour, culture and persona of the child to get adapted with its own culture. Here in *Secret Daughter* by Shilpi Somayagowda, Asha makes an effort to find out her origin. But Lucy Grace of *The Light Between the Oceans* was brought up as if Isabel's own daughter without knowing her parentage. Likewise, these two novels got the same line of adoption beyond nations and the mental conflict undergone by biological parents and adopted parents to fully express their parenthood. Crisis and challenges they gone through make the storyline of these two novels.

Keywords: Motherhood, adoption, biological parenthood, adopted parenthood

INTRODUCTION

Motherhood is the highest and most blessed status, a woman can experience in her life. The novel *Secret Daughter* by

Shilpi SomayaGowda(American Woman Writer) is the story of an adoption across nations. Asha is a young girl who lives in USA with her adopted parents. She finds her

way to her biological parents in India. The debut novel *The Light between Oceans* by M L Stedman (Australian Woman Writer) in 2012 deals with the highly complicated struggle of two mothers; Isabel, the gifted mother and Hannah, the biological mother of Lucy- Grace. Adoption has become common these days. These novels cover the story of the adoptions which are made beyond nations. Both the biological and adopted mothers long for their motherhood to be completed with their child. No one showed their hatred towards their adopted baby. These common features among these two novels made the study a relevant one for the article.

LONGINGNESS OF MOTHERS

The novel 'Secret Daughter' has two mothers- Kavita, the biological mother, one who gave birth to Asha, and Somer, the adopted mother, who lived in America. In Indian society, the male children are given special preference than the girl children. Girls are considered as burden by their own parents. So there was a practice of female infanticide to kill the girl babies immediately after the birth. Kavita, a malnourished woman from the village named Dahanu gave birth to girl baby, who had already gave her first daughter to death. When the second girl baby was born, she

was not ready to give her up. She asked her husband to allow her to spend a day with the baby. She longs to enjoy the pleasures of being a mother with her newly born. Kavita names her Usha and thinks on how to hide the baby from the scary eyes of her patriarchal family. They prefer a boy baby who could work with them in the fields. But for a mother, the gender of the baby is of no importance. She loves her children whether it is a boy or girl. Likewise Kavita loves Usha even though her husband does not want the girl child.

Kavita's love for Usha continued though she gave her to the orphanage. Kavita imagines Usha as a little girl with two braids. She worries for her child in the whole of her life. The birth of Vijay gave the family abundant happiness. But Kavita felt deeply hurt for her two children who born before Vijay. It haunts throughout her life. Somer, the adopted mother of Asha imagined enjoying the pleasure of parenthood with Asha. She never thought of the differences they both had in colour. Somer's consecutive miscarriages led her to a state of depression. So she agrees with the decision to adopt Asha. Her love to enjoy the parenthood makes her to go India for adopting an Indian child. Somer feels hurt when the world is not accepting them as

mother and daughter. She did not expect the racial prejudice and discrimination that she would face for her daughter. Somer could not feel Asha as her own so that she could not enjoy the motherhood with her daughter.

In M.L. Stedman's *The Light between Oceans* Isabel had the chance of nursing Lucy when she was only three months old. Isabel accepted Lucy whole heartedly and cherished each and every moment spent with her as God has answered her prayers. Motherhood is an attitude that strongly protects, safeguards, dreams, aspires, achieves and exercise everything only for the welfare of the child. Both mothers want to save Lucy by all means. Isabel expected the gift of a child to make life more meaningful. Lucy's entry into the world of Isabel has changed a lot to the development of the characters and the story. Hannah, Lucy's biological mother on the other shore is also filled with motherly love to receive Lucy. Hannah gets success in getting Lucy back with much difficulty. Hannah is so emotional and wants to punish Tom for killing her husband and owning Grace Roennfeldt for nearly two years. Hannah is doubly worried in getting Grace filled with the memories of Tom and Isabel. Grace's behaviour tenses her a lot as it was not expected by her.

MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

The Secret Daughter is the story of an American girl Asha who is an Indian by birth, adopted by her Indian father and American mother. She knows of her adoption from childhood. Though she enjoyed the love of Krishnan and Somer, she could not forget that she is an adopted child. She is in resemblance with Krishnan, her adopted father. But she differs from Somer in everything especially colour. As a white mother, she is not prepared for the racial prejudice and discrimination that backlash on her daughter. Shilpa expresses the grief of Somer in her words as "Somer looks at her daughter, who looks nothing like her daughter." When Jasu and the family went to Bombay, Kavita found the orphanage. Till now she could hear the voice of her girl child somewhere in her mind. She often visits there to look for Asha, a little girl with two braids. She is not aware of Usha's adoption. The mother's quest for her secret daughter prolongs. It haunts her and when she saw a girl child in the crowd with Usha's resemblance, Kavita just followed the little girl, by pulling her son, to get the glimpses of the little girl's face, but the girl's face faded among to crowd.

Performing the duty of a mother and experiencing motherhood differs very

slightly. Isabel and Hannah have possessions over Lucy- Grace as they have every right to claim her. Hannah's depression is deeper as she is a great loser to have lost Frank and Grace at one stroke. Isabel expected the gift of a child to make life more meaningful. Lucy's entry into the world of Isabel has changed a lot to the development of the characters and the story. Hannah, on the other shore is also filled with motherly love to receive Lucy. Her sustained hope of getting Grace gives a life and meaning to survive. As she wished, Grace is back in the hands of Hannah. Hannah feels highly elated and wants to own her as a whole. Isabel Graysmark is a butterfly of Partageuse who enjoys the world in her own way. Her meeting of Tom signals her to live with him. Isabel feels, "Life could snatch away the things you treasured, and there was no getting them back" (74). She enjoys Janus Rock, the life at Light house. Yet her soul longs for a baby as she gets repeated miscarriages. Her behavior at the last stillborn which was much expected to have got life is the deepest sorrow of Isabel. In her immersed suffering a ray of hope flashed in the form of Lucy. "Having come so close to the hands of death, life now fused with life like water meets water"(123). Even before her mind reasons out things happened, her hands folded the babe that

strives for life. The mother in Isabel feeds the dying little infant and owns her. Isabel is highly possessed by the concept 'Lucy is God's gift' and her answered prayer.

FATHER – DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

"It is not hard to become a father. Being one is the difficult part" – Wilhelm Busch

The mothers are often the symbol of nurturing and caring. But fathers and daughters have the unique bond. Women who have a good relationship with their fathers are lucky enough to look back at their fond memories when they grow up. In the *Secret Daughter*, the relationship between Krishnan and Asha is stronger than Asha's relationship with Somer. Asha resembles the colour of her father and some of his features too. Somer envies that father-daughter relationship. He allows Asha to know of Indian heritage. Asha's interest in journalism takes her to India to pursue her study. She takes it as a chance to find out her biological parents about whom she did not know anything. Somer gets a rude shock when she realises that Asha, in truth, wants to locate her biological parents. But Krishnan accepts her decision to find her origin.

The Light between Oceans has the Janus couple who love Lucy a lot. Tom performs his role as a very dutiful father to

take Lucy out and introduce the world of insects, the sounds of waves, stars, sun and moon. Lucy too calls him Dadda and loves the company of father a lot in knowing things. Isabel's love for Lucy blinded her to think about the suffering of the biological mother, Hannah. Isabel is highly conscious of attending Lucy. Her moral values and spiritual belief supported Isabel to possess Lucy with no question of ownership. Tom Sherbourne, a dutiful blonke to maintain records and duties is well aware of the consequences of keeping Lucy. He tries to console Isabel of the reality and the right procedure,

Izz, there's a woman in town who thinks her daughter's dead when she's alive; who doesn't know what happened to her husband. God knows what she's been through. The sooner we put her out of misery.(186)

Helpless he became the father of the two, Lucy and Isabel yet his guilty consciousness attempts him to write to Hannah,

Don't fret for her. The baby is safe. Loved and well cared for, and always will be. Your husband is at peace in God's hands. I hope this

brings you comfort. Pray for me.(194)

As Tom loves Isabel he accepts the punishment out of love and is highly determined not to trouble Isabel, "He cannot reconcile the grief he feels at what he has done and the profound relief that runs through him."

PORTRAYAL OF PARENTHOOD

Kavita of *Secret Daughter* could not save her first baby girl born before Asha. But this time she decided to save her baby from the clutches of the inhumane society. She asks for a day to be spent with the child. Rupa and Kavita went to Bombay and decided to leave Asha in an orphanage. When Jasu and the family went to Bombay, Kavita found the orphanage. Till now she could hear the voice of her girl child somewhere in her mind. She often visits there to look for Asha, a little girl with two braids. She is not aware of Usha's adoption. The mother's quest for her secret daughter prolongs. It haunts her and when she saw a girl child in the crowd with Usha's resemblance, Kavita just followed the little girl, by pulling her son, to get the glimpses of the little girl's face, but the girl's face faded among to crowd.

Krishnan's mother Sarla loves her son very much. She always feels proud of him and allows him to do anything he likes. In the beginning, she is not happy with Somer. But she loves Somer with a motherly bond when they visit India for adoption. Sarla is longing for a daughter to share her life lessons. She presents her a shawl as she feels Somer would not be comfortable with saree. She helps Somer in nursing Asha. Sarla takes too much care of Asha. Asha enjoys her days in India in the company of her grandmother. She feels bad about the years how she missed the love of grandmother.

Kavita's mother boosts up her spirit before leaving Dahanu to head towards Bombay. Kavita remembers the word 'Shakthi', used by her mother to encourage her. Kavita always thought of her daughter Asha whom she first named as Usha. Usha was separated from her mother within few hours of her birth. "As she feels Usha pried from her hands, she hears only the screaming inside her head, then the shriek, coming from her own mouth. She hears Usha wailing."(SD 34) After this traumatic experience and during her daily prayer she always sees her lost babies' faces, their small bodies, their cries and she feels their tiny fingers wrap around hers.

Kavita was stunned by the sudden attention and care from her relatives when she gave birth to a boy baby. The double standard culture of India is documented by the author in this novel. The society acknowledge a woman only if she gives birth to a boy baby. Though all celebrated the ceremony, but for Kavita, "an aching candy in her heart for what she's lost". She notices Jasu's pride by holding his son. Kavita prays, "She will be a good mother to her son, prays she has enough maternal love left in her heart for him, prays it didn't die along with her daughters."(SD 65)

Jasu and Kavita totally devastated when they came to know their son's illegal involvement against the Government. Jasu lost all his hopes, he was the person who strongly believed that by raising a son, it shows him the way to wealth and instead it brought only a bad name. For the first time in his life he realized that his notion was misconception and wrong belief and got disappointed. As a mother Kavita everyday prays for her secret daughter and for her son. She prays for Vijay's safety and his redemption. Though Kavita rejoiced her motherhood, she always dredged up her memories of her secret daughter. "In all these years, she has never been able to imagine what her daughter would look like as a grown woman, so this is the image she

keeps in her mind, a young child frozen in time.” (SD 281)

Here in *Light between the Oceans*, Lucy enjoys the motherly care of Isabel and misses her a lot. It is beyond her age to express her love for Isabel and Tom, yet she reveals in all circumstances that she needs Isabel. ‘I’m not Grace! I’m Lucy!’ cried the child. I want to go home! Where’s Mamma? You are not my mummy!’ She is matured enough to understand the reality and meets Isabel with a condition not to inform it to Hannah is a moving scene in the entire novel. She even dares to walk out of home in search of Tom and Isabel.

Hannah Roennfeldt who had a love marriage and a consequence of it missed her husband, and her two months baby, undergoes the hysterical suffering of a mother. Though her father and sister supported her, they could never trace any positive link about the lost thread and the way where her husband and baby is. But as a mother, she could sense the presence of them somewhere away in this world and gets disturbed. An unauthorized letter from Tom gives life to Hannah’s deepest soul’s confidence to speed up the search in finding Isabel. Hannah gets success in getting Lucy back with much difficulties. Hannah is so emotional and wants to punish Tom for

killing her husband and owning Grace Roennfeldt for nearly two years. Hannah is doubly worried in getting Grace filled with the memories of Tom and Isabel. Grace’s behavior tenses her a lot as it was not expected by her.

THE BINDING THREAD OF LOVE

The secret daughter’s image was perfectly clear in Kavita’s mind. She visualizes her girl child playing, smiling, eating and sleeping with other children in the orphanage. This picture gave Kavita a sense of relief that her girl child lives somewhere in the world with food and shelter. With these images of her secret daughter she carries out her rest of the day. She left her silver bangle as an anklet for her girl child. That was the only asset that she could leave for her daughter. Asha kept it as a precious asset that could be an invisible link with her biological mother. She returns to her adopted parents not visiting her biological parents. She realises the love of her mother because of whom she is now leading a peaceful and comfy life. Otherwise she should have ended up as the young woman she interviewed who sells her body to earn her living.

Kavita mourned for all things that she lost, when she returned back to her village. She lost her two daughters, lost her son’s innocence,

been away from her family, now at last lost her parents. Kavita's heart was filled with emptiness, the quest for her secret daughter travelled throughout her life. At last she got an answer about her secret daughter, Jasu collected information from the Shanti Orphanage that, their daughter name was Asha now, she was adopted by American – Indian Parents, they are doctors by profession, and settled in America. After hearing this, "Kavita closes her eyes and a tear drops down the side of her face and into her ear. So far from home. All this time, she 's been so far from us." (SD 339) Even Jasu was haunted by his past, for killing of his new born girl baby. After knowing about his second daughter, he praised his wife for what she had done. It was a good thing and Kavita's decision gave their child a new, healthy and affluent life, unlike the children in Dharavi slums. He even felt that his wife gave their daughter a dignified life. He showed Asha's hand written page, which carried, "My Name is Asha..."(SD 339) She broke down after knowing that her daughter came to orphanage to get information of her biological parents.

Tom refers motherhood to be a "mysterious business" (LBO 98). Neither the mother nor motherhood thinks rationally. It goes only with the dedicated concept, to care and share, showing love, tendering and sacrificing for the sake of love. Being a mother is a wonderful blessing in this world.

Mothers take more and complete responsibilities of the babies. The unrequited love of a mother transforms her to be a sacrificing servant and godly authoritarian over the kid. This is same with both the mothers. Both exercise the same degree of love when Lucy- Grace is gifted to them at various situations. It is a divine quality of Isabel to own Lucy though not biologically. Mother in Hannah prevents Grace to see Isabel. She takes her far away from Isabel yet the motherhood in her informs Grace of the Janus episode, which makes Lucy to revisit Tom. Therefore an invisible bond of love could be seen between the characters of these novels till the end which makes the novels lively and unforgettable to the readers.

CONCLUSION

Gowda both as a writer and as a mother of two children captured the trauma of a poor and helpless mother from a rural village who struggles to survive in the society by losing her identity, name, two daughters, village and her parents. Kavita felt completed when she learned about her secret daughter's safe and secured life. Motherhood is inherent and at times highly identified with lovable persons like Isabel and Hannah. Both Isabel and Hannah failed as mothers, yet their motherhood wins hearts

of multiple as they brought Grace – Lucy with the same love. Through the challenges they undergone, the parents in these novels, portrayed their love for the children though it was an adopted one.

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