

Demythologizing Motherhood: A Postcolonial Feminist Reading of Maternal Ambivalence in Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar*

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Abstract - Motherhood has traditionally been portrayed in literature as a sacred institution associated with unconditional love, self-sacrifice, and emotional fulfillment. Contemporary feminist literature, however, challenges these idealized representations by presenting motherhood as a complex and often conflicting experience shaped by personal, psychological, and socio-cultural realities. Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* (2020) offers a powerful critique of conventional notions of motherhood through the emotionally turbulent relationship between Tara and her daughter Antara. This paper examines how the novel dismantles patriarchal myths surrounding motherhood by foregrounding maternal ambivalence, psychological trauma, female identity, and intergenerational conflict. Employing feminist literary criticism, postcolonial feminist theory, and psychoanalytic perspectives, the study investigates how Tara's experiences expose the emotional costs of compulsory motherhood within a patriarchal Indian society. The analysis further explores the symbolic significance of memory, domestic spaces, water imagery, and the metaphor of burnt sugar in representing fractured maternal identities and unresolved trauma. Rather than depicting motherhood as a naturally fulfilling role, Doshi presents it as a contested social construct that often demands the suppression of women's individuality. The study argues that *Burnt Sugar* expands contemporary Indian feminist discourse by validating maternal dissatisfaction and emotional complexity while challenging idealized cultural narratives of womanhood. Through its nuanced portrayal of flawed motherhood, the novel contributes significantly to ongoing conversations about gender, identity, agency, and the psychological consequences of patriarchal expectations in contemporary Indian literature.

Keywords: Motherhood, Maternal Ambivalence, Feminism, Postcolonial Feminism, Avni Doshi, *Burnt Sugar*, Indian English Literature

1. INTRODUCTION

Motherhood has long occupied a central position in literary discourse, often functioning as a symbol of unconditional love, sacrifice, emotional strength, and moral responsibility. Across cultures, literary traditions have celebrated mothers as selfless caregivers whose identities are inseparable from nurturing and protecting their families. Such representations have contributed to the construction of an idealized image of motherhood that frequently overlooks the emotional conflicts, psychological struggles, and personal sacrifices experienced by women. While classical and modern literary texts have portrayed mothers as embodiments of devotion and resilience, contemporary feminist literature increasingly

questions these romanticized assumptions by presenting motherhood as a socially constructed institution shaped by patriarchal expectations rather than an inherently fulfilling experience.

In the Indian cultural context, motherhood occupies an especially revered position. Traditional social values frequently associate a woman's identity with her role as a mother, emphasizing sacrifice, obedience, domestic responsibility, and unconditional care. Religious narratives, mythology, and cultural practices reinforce the perception of motherhood as the highest expression of womanhood. Consequently, women who express dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion, or ambivalence toward motherhood are often viewed as violating deeply rooted social expectations. Such idealization silences the diverse emotional realities of mothers and discourages open discussions regarding maternal identity, psychological distress, and individual aspirations beyond domestic roles. The emergence of feminist literary criticism has significantly transformed scholarly understanding of motherhood by exposing the ideological structures that shape maternal identities. Feminist scholars such as Adrienne Rich argue that motherhood should be understood not merely as a biological experience but as a cultural institution regulated by patriarchal systems. Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir demonstrates how gender roles are socially constructed, limiting women's autonomy through prescribed expectations of femininity and domesticity. Later feminist thinkers including Judith Butler and Marianne Hirsch further examine the ways gender performance, maternal subjectivity, and intergenerational relationships reproduce social hierarchies and emotional inheritance. These theoretical interventions have encouraged literary scholars to reinterpret motherhood as a dynamic site of negotiation involving power, identity, agency, and resistance.

Within contemporary Indian English literature, Avni Doshi has emerged as one of the most influential voices exploring women's interior lives. Her debut novel *Burnt Sugar*, shortlisted for the 2020 Booker Prize, presents an emotionally complex narrative centered on the deteriorating relationship between Tara and her daughter Antara. Narrated primarily through Antara's perspective, the novel moves between past and present, revealing memories of neglect, affection, resentment, and caregiving that blur conventional distinctions between victim and perpetrator. Rather than depicting motherhood through sentimental or moralistic frameworks, Doshi portrays it as an emotionally demanding and psychologically fragmented experience shaped by trauma, memory, and social expectations.

Tara represents a striking departure from the archetype of the ideal mother. She is neither consistently nurturing nor entirely neglectful; instead, her maternal identity is characterized by contradiction, emotional instability, and a

persistent desire for autonomy. Her unresolved childhood trauma, dissatisfaction with domestic life, and struggle to preserve her individuality challenge dominant cultural narratives that equate motherhood with complete self-sacrifice. Antara's own experiences as a daughter and later as a mother further reveal how emotional wounds are transmitted across generations, creating cycles of attachment, resentment, and caregiving that resist simplistic explanations. The novel also reflects broader questions concerning women's agency in postcolonial Indian society. Although contemporary Indian women have gained greater educational and professional opportunities, traditional gender expectations continue to influence perceptions of family, marriage, and motherhood. Women are frequently expected to reconcile professional ambitions with domestic responsibilities while maintaining emotional composure and unconditional caregiving. *Burnt Sugar* exposes the psychological burden created by these conflicting expectations and demonstrates how patriarchal ideologies continue to shape women's identities despite social modernization.

Another remarkable feature of the novel is its sophisticated use of symbolism and fragmented narrative structure. The recurring metaphor of burnt sugar symbolizes the transformation of sweetness into bitterness, reflecting the gradual erosion of idealized motherhood under emotional pressure. Images of water, memory, illness, and bodily deterioration further illustrate the instability of identity and the persistence of unresolved trauma. The nonlinear narrative mirrors the fragmented psychological states of both Tara and Antara, emphasizing the subjective nature of memory and emotional experience.

Although several scholars have examined *Burnt Sugar* from feminist, psychological, and postcolonial perspectives, relatively few studies integrate these theoretical approaches into a comprehensive analysis of maternal ambivalence. Existing scholarship often addresses trauma, gender, or family relationships independently without fully exploring how these dimensions intersect in constructing alternative representations of motherhood. This study seeks to address that gap by combining feminist literary criticism, psychoanalytic interpretation, and postcolonial feminist theory to examine how Doshi redefines motherhood beyond conventional cultural narratives.

Accordingly, this paper investigates the following objectives:

- To examine the representation of maternal ambivalence in *Burnt Sugar*.
- To analyze the psychological dimensions of motherhood and intergenerational trauma.
- To explore how feminist and postcolonial theories illuminate the construction of female identity within the novel.
- To evaluate the symbolic and narrative techniques employed by Doshi in challenging idealized notions of motherhood.
- To assess the novel's contribution to contemporary Indian feminist literature.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative textual analysis based on close reading of the novel. Feminist literary criticism, psychoanalytic concepts concerning trauma and

identity formation, and postcolonial feminist perspectives provide the principal analytical frameworks. Through these complementary approaches, the paper demonstrates that motherhood in *Burnt Sugar* is not presented as a fixed biological destiny but as a contested cultural institution shaped by memory, gender ideology, emotional inheritance, and social power.

2. MATERNAL AMBIVALENCE

One of the most significant contributions of Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* is its uncompromising portrayal of maternal ambivalence. Rather than depicting motherhood as an instinctive source of fulfillment, the novel presents it as a psychologically demanding experience characterized by emotional conflict, identity fragmentation, and unresolved trauma. Tara's relationship with her daughter Antara challenges deeply rooted assumptions regarding maternal affection by exposing the coexistence of love, resentment, care, and rejection within a single emotional framework. Through this nuanced characterization, Doshi dismantles the conventional binary of the "good mother" and the "bad mother," presenting motherhood instead as a dynamic psychological condition shaped by individual histories and social expectations.

Maternal ambivalence occupies a central position in feminist scholarship because it questions the belief that motherhood naturally produces unconditional devotion. Feminist theorists argue that the institution of motherhood often demands emotional perfection while denying women the freedom to acknowledge frustration, exhaustion, or dissatisfaction. In *Burnt Sugar*, Tara embodies this contradiction. She loves her daughter, yet she simultaneously experiences motherhood as an overwhelming burden that threatens her personal identity. Her recurring desire to escape maternal responsibilities reflects not emotional deficiency but the consequences of living within a patriarchal system that equates female worth with selfless caregiving.

Tara's emotional instability is closely connected to her traumatic childhood experiences. Having been abandoned by her own mother at an early age, she grows up with profound feelings of emotional insecurity and abandonment. The absence of maternal affection during childhood leaves psychological scars that continue to influence her adult relationships. Rather than receiving a nurturing model of motherhood, Tara inherits emotional deprivation, which later shapes her interactions with Antara. Her inability to provide consistent care illustrates how unresolved trauma can interrupt the development of secure emotional attachment across generations.

Psychoanalytic theories of attachment help explain Tara's contradictory behavior. According to attachment theorists, early relationships with caregivers significantly influence an individual's emotional development and capacity to establish stable interpersonal relationships. Tara's fractured childhood creates an insecure emotional foundation that manifests in unpredictable maternal behavior. She oscillates between affection and withdrawal, warmth and emotional distance, demonstrating that maternal care is neither instinctive nor immune to psychological damage. Doshi thereby challenges essentialist assumptions that biological motherhood automatically guarantees emotional competence.

The narrative also reveals that Tara continually struggles to reconcile motherhood with her desire for individuality. Throughout the novel, she repeatedly expresses frustration

with the expectation that motherhood should become the defining feature of her existence. Her longing for independence reflects a broader feminist critique of patriarchal societies that reduce women to domestic roles while marginalizing their intellectual, professional, and emotional aspirations. Tara perceives motherhood as a role that gradually consumes her identity, leaving little space for personal growth or self-expression. This internal conflict generates persistent resentment, not because she lacks maternal feelings, but because she refuses to surrender her individuality entirely.

Doshi presents this struggle with remarkable psychological realism. Tara is not portrayed as deliberately cruel or emotionally detached; rather, she is depicted as a woman attempting to survive conflicting social expectations while carrying unresolved emotional wounds. Her psychological fragmentation becomes particularly evident in moments when maternal affection unexpectedly shifts into hostility. These emotional fluctuations are not presented as moral failures but as manifestations of cumulative psychological pressure. By humanizing Tara instead of condemning her, Doshi encourages readers to reconsider rigid cultural judgments surrounding maternal behavior.

The most disturbing illustration of Tara's psychological breakdown occurs during the scene in which she attempts to drown Antara. Although shocking, this episode functions symbolically rather than merely sensationally. It represents the culmination of years of emotional exhaustion, identity crisis, and suppressed resentment. Within psychoanalytic interpretation, the act symbolizes Tara's desperate attempt to escape the overwhelming demands of motherhood rather than a calculated expression of violence toward her child. Doshi deliberately resists simplifying this incident into conventional categories of maternal monstrosity. Instead, she presents it as the tragic outcome of psychological fragmentation intensified by social expectations that deny women emotional autonomy. Equally important is the novel's exploration of Antara's psychological development. Growing up within an unstable emotional environment profoundly shapes her understanding of intimacy, trust, and caregiving. Throughout childhood, Antara experiences alternating periods of affection and rejection, creating persistent uncertainty regarding her mother's feelings. This inconsistency fosters anxiety and emotional hypervigilance, characteristics commonly associated with insecure attachment. Even as an adult, Antara remains emotionally entangled with Tara, unable to establish complete psychological independence despite recognizing the toxicity of their relationship.

Ironically, as Tara develops dementia and becomes increasingly dependent on others, the traditional mother-daughter relationship undergoes a dramatic reversal. Antara gradually assumes responsibility for caring for the very person who once neglected her emotional needs. This reversal introduces another layer of psychological complexity. Antara's caregiving is motivated by obligation, compassion, resentment, and guilt simultaneously. Her experience demonstrates that caregiving within families rarely consists of pure affection; instead, it often involves conflicting emotions rooted in shared histories of pain and attachment.

Memory plays a crucial role in constructing these psychological tensions. The nonlinear narrative reflects the fragmented nature of traumatic recollection, moving unpredictably between childhood memories and present experiences. Rather than presenting events chronologically,

Doshi allows memories to emerge through emotional associations, illustrating how trauma disrupts conventional understandings of time. Antara continually revisits painful childhood experiences while attempting to interpret her mother's present behavior, suggesting that psychological wounds remain active rather than confined to the past. Memory therefore functions not simply as recollection but as an ongoing process through which personal identity is continually reconstructed. Another important psychological dimension of the novel concerns dementia. Tara's cognitive decline complicates moral judgments regarding responsibility and forgiveness. As her memory deteriorates, she gradually loses access to the very experiences that have defined Antara's life. This creates a painful asymmetry: Antara remains haunted by memories that Tara herself can no longer remember. Dementia thus becomes more than a medical condition; it symbolizes the instability of identity and the fragility of personal history. The illness raises difficult ethical questions regarding accountability, reconciliation, and the possibility of healing when shared memories themselves begin to disappear.

The novel further demonstrates how psychological trauma becomes intergenerational. Tara inherits emotional abandonment from her own mother and unconsciously reproduces similar patterns in her relationship with Antara. Later, Antara fears that she may transmit comparable emotional insecurities to her own daughter despite her determination to become a different kind of mother. Doshi therefore illustrates that trauma rarely ends with one generation. Unless consciously confronted, emotional wounds often continue through inherited behaviors, fears, and relational patterns. This cyclical representation of motherhood emphasizes that maternal identity develops within historical and familial contexts rather than through biological instinct alone.

Despite its exploration of suffering, *Burnt Sugar* avoids reducing motherhood to despair. Moments of tenderness continue to emerge unexpectedly throughout the narrative, revealing that love and resentment are not mutually exclusive. Tara occasionally demonstrates genuine concern for Antara, while Antara continues caring for her mother despite years of emotional neglect. These moments complicate simplistic interpretations of their relationship by acknowledging that human emotions often resist fixed categories. Maternal love, in Doshi's portrayal, is imperfect, contradictory, and deeply influenced by memory and circumstance.

3. FEMINIST AND POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON MOTHERHOOD AND FEMALE IDENTITY

Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* is not merely a psychological novel about an unconventional mother-daughter relationship; it is also a powerful feminist critique of the cultural structures that regulate women's identities through the institution of motherhood. By portraying Tara as a woman who resists, questions, and occasionally rejects the expectations imposed upon her, Doshi exposes the contradictions embedded within patriarchal constructions of femininity. The novel demonstrates that motherhood is neither a purely biological instinct nor an inherently fulfilling social role but a culturally mediated experience shaped by gender ideology, power relations, and historical traditions. Through feminist and postcolonial perspectives, *Burnt Sugar* redefines motherhood

as a contested space where women negotiate autonomy, identity, and social responsibility. A central concern of feminist literary criticism has been the distinction between motherhood as a personal experience and motherhood as a social institution. Adrienne Rich argues that while becoming a mother can be a deeply meaningful human experience, patriarchal societies transform motherhood into an institution that disciplines women's behavior and limits their autonomy. Women are expected to prioritize caregiving above personal aspirations, emotional well-being, and professional ambitions. These expectations often remain invisible because they are normalized through cultural traditions, religious values, and family structures. Doshi's novel vividly illustrates this tension through Tara's continuous struggle to preserve her individuality while fulfilling the demands associated with motherhood.

Unlike conventional literary mothers, Tara refuses to perform the role of the endlessly patient and self-sacrificing caregiver. Her dissatisfaction with domestic responsibilities reflects an awareness that motherhood has gradually consumed her personal identity. She repeatedly experiences the maternal role as restrictive rather than empowering, questioning why society assumes that women should willingly surrender their individuality after childbirth. In presenting these emotional conflicts, Doshi challenges one of the most enduring patriarchal myths—that motherhood naturally completes a woman's identity. Instead, the novel suggests that compulsory motherhood frequently produces psychological exhaustion precisely because it demands the suppression of female subjectivity.

This critique resonates strongly with Simone de Beauvoir's argument that women are not born into predetermined social identities but become women through cultural conditioning. According to de Beauvoir, patriarchal societies assign women specific roles associated with nurturing, emotional labor, and domesticity while restricting opportunities for self-definition. Tara's experiences demonstrate the consequences of such conditioning. Her inability to reconcile her personal ambitions with social expectations generates persistent frustration, revealing that her emotional struggles arise less from individual inadequacy than from structural inequalities embedded within gender norms. Doshi thereby shifts responsibility away from the individual mother and toward the patriarchal system that constructs impossible standards of feminine perfection. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity further illuminates Tara's resistance to conventional motherhood. Butler argues that gender identities are continuously produced through repeated social performances rather than determined by biological sex. Motherhood, similarly, becomes a performance governed by culturally prescribed behaviors. Society expects mothers to demonstrate patience, unconditional affection, emotional stability, and complete selflessness regardless of their internal experiences. Tara repeatedly fails—or refuses—to perform these expectations successfully. Her emotional outbursts, desire for independence, and expressions of maternal dissatisfaction expose the artificial nature of these prescribed gender performances. Rather than presenting Tara as deviant, Doshi reveals that the performance itself is unsustainable because it ignores women's psychological complexity.

The novel also critiques the patriarchal division of emotional labor within the family. Throughout *Burnt Sugar*, caregiving responsibilities fall disproportionately upon women. Mothers are expected to provide emotional security, maintain domestic stability, and absorb family tensions without

complaint. Male characters, by contrast, remain comparatively detached from these responsibilities. This unequal distribution reflects broader gender hierarchies within Indian society, where domestic care continues to be perceived primarily as women's work despite significant social and economic transformations. Doshi's portrayal suggests that maternal burnout emerges not because women lack resilience but because patriarchal family structures normalize unequal expectations.

The postcolonial dimension of the novel further enriches this feminist critique. Postcolonial feminist scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty emphasize that women's experiences cannot be understood solely through universal feminist frameworks; they must also be examined within specific historical, cultural, and political contexts. Indian motherhood is shaped not only by patriarchy but also by colonial legacies that reinforced Victorian ideals of domestic femininity. During the colonial period, women were frequently represented as guardians of cultural purity and moral virtue, responsible for preserving family traditions while remaining confined to domestic spaces. These ideals continue to influence contemporary expectations surrounding motherhood, making it difficult for women to articulate dissatisfaction without facing social condemnation. Within this cultural framework, Tara's rejection of idealized motherhood becomes an act of subtle resistance. She refuses to embody the mythologized figure of the endlessly nurturing Indian mother whose existence revolves entirely around her family. Instead, she insists—sometimes unsuccessfully—upon her right to personal freedom and emotional complexity. Her resistance does not take the form of organized political activism but emerges through everyday acts of emotional refusal. In this sense, Doshi demonstrates that resistance to patriarchy often occurs within ordinary domestic spaces rather than exclusively through public political movements.

The novel also interrogates how patriarchal ideologies are transmitted across generations. Marianne Hirsch's concept of "patriarchal mothering" suggests that mothers frequently reproduce the very gender norms that have constrained their own lives, often unconsciously. *Burnt Sugar* illustrates this phenomenon through the relationships linking Tara, her own mother, Antara, and eventually Antara's daughter. Emotional wounds, caregiving patterns, and expectations regarding femininity circulate from one generation to another, creating cycles of inherited trauma. Tara's inability to provide emotional security partly reflects the absence of maternal care in her own childhood. Likewise, Antara fears repeating similar patterns despite consciously attempting to become a different kind of mother. Doshi therefore portrays motherhood as a historically conditioned experience rather than an isolated individual choice.

Ultimately, *Burnt Sugar* represents an important contribution to contemporary feminist and postcolonial literature because it dismantles idealized representations of motherhood while refusing to replace them with equally reductive alternatives. Tara is neither celebrated as a feminist hero nor condemned as a failed mother. Instead, she remains profoundly human—capable of love, resentment, vulnerability, anger, compassion, and regret. This refusal to impose moral absolutes allows Doshi to present motherhood as an evolving negotiation between personal identity and social expectation.

By integrating feminist theory with postcolonial perspectives, *Burnt Sugar* demonstrates that maternal identity is shaped by intersecting structures of gender, culture, history, and power.

The novel challenges readers to reconsider deeply embedded assumptions regarding femininity, caregiving, and family, ultimately arguing that acknowledging maternal ambivalence is not an attack on motherhood but a necessary step toward understanding women's lived experiences in all their complexity.

4. DISCUSSION

The analysis of *Burnt Sugar* demonstrates that Avni Doshi fundamentally challenges the traditional representation of motherhood as an unquestioned source of emotional fulfillment and feminine identity. Instead of reinforcing the culturally sanctioned image of the ideal mother, the novel presents motherhood as a psychologically complex, socially constructed, and emotionally demanding experience. Through the intertwined lives of Tara and Antara, Doshi exposes the tensions between individual identity and patriarchal expectations, revealing that maternal love is neither unconditional nor free from conflict. This nuanced representation marks a significant departure from conventional literary depictions of motherhood in Indian English fiction.

One of the novel's most important contributions lies in its validation of maternal ambivalence. Feminist discourse has increasingly argued that the expectation of perfect motherhood silences women's authentic emotional experiences. *Burnt Sugar* supports this argument by portraying Tara's contradictory emotions—love, resentment, guilt, and emotional exhaustion—as natural responses to the pressures of compulsory motherhood rather than indicators of moral failure. The novel therefore shifts scholarly attention from judging maternal behaviour to understanding the psychological and social conditions that shape it. By refusing to divide mothers into simplistic categories of "good" or "bad," Doshi offers a more humane and realistic representation of maternal subjectivity.

The psychological dimension of the novel further enriches its critique of idealized motherhood. Tara's unresolved childhood trauma, coupled with her desire for personal autonomy, profoundly influences her relationship with Antara. Rather than presenting trauma as an isolated personal experience, Doshi illustrates how emotional wounds are transmitted across generations through patterns of caregiving, attachment, and memory. Antara's own fears regarding motherhood demonstrate that trauma extends beyond individual lives and becomes embedded within family histories. The novel thus aligns with contemporary psychological research emphasizing that childhood experiences significantly influence adult emotional relationships and caregiving practices.

The feminist perspective reveals that Tara's emotional struggles are inseparable from patriarchal expectations surrounding womanhood. Society repeatedly defines women through domestic roles while expecting them to suppress personal ambitions in favour of caregiving responsibilities. Doshi exposes the emotional consequences of these expectations by depicting motherhood as a role that frequently demands the sacrifice of individuality. Tara's resistance should therefore be interpreted not as a rejection of motherhood itself but as a rejection of social structures that deny women the right to exist beyond maternal identities. In doing so, the novel contributes to broader feminist conversations concerning female agency, identity, and emotional autonomy.

The postcolonial dimension of *Burnt Sugar* further strengthens its critical intervention. The novel demonstrates that contemporary Indian motherhood remains influenced by historical ideals rooted in colonial and patriarchal constructions of femininity. Women continue to be celebrated as symbols of sacrifice, morality, and family honour while simultaneously being denied emotional complexity. By portraying Tara as a deeply flawed yet profoundly human individual, Doshi dismantles these inherited cultural myths and reclaims motherhood as a lived experience rather than an ideological ideal. Her narrative illustrates that the liberation of women requires questioning not only patriarchal institutions but also culturally internalized assumptions regarding gender and family.

Doshi's narrative technique also deserves particular attention. The fragmented chronology, shifting memories, and symbolic imagery reinforce the instability of personal identity and the persistence of trauma. Rather than providing a linear account of family conflict, the novel mirrors the fractured nature of psychological memory, allowing readers to experience uncertainty alongside the characters. Symbols such as burnt sugar, water, bodily deterioration, and domestic spaces function not merely as literary devices but as representations of emotional transformation, identity erosion, and the fragile boundaries between love and resentment. These aesthetic choices deepen the novel's exploration of motherhood by linking narrative form with psychological experience. Taken together, the psychological, feminist, and postcolonial dimensions of *Burnt Sugar* reveal that motherhood is best understood as a complex social institution rather than an essential biological destiny. Doshi's novel encourages readers to move beyond idealized representations and acknowledge the emotional contradictions that characterize real maternal experiences. Consequently, *Burnt Sugar* occupies an important place within contemporary Indian English literature by expanding scholarly discussions of gender, identity, memory, and family while offering a powerful critique of patriarchal constructions of motherhood.

5. CONCLUSION

Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* offers one of the most compelling contemporary literary explorations of motherhood in Indian English literature. By portraying the emotionally turbulent relationship between Tara and Antara, the novel dismantles long-standing cultural myths that associate motherhood exclusively with unconditional love, sacrifice, and personal fulfillment. Instead, Doshi presents motherhood as a multifaceted experience shaped by trauma, memory, psychological conflict, and social expectations.

This study demonstrates that maternal ambivalence constitutes the central thematic concern of the novel. Tara's contradictory emotions reflect not individual inadequacy but the emotional consequences of patriarchal systems that demand complete self-sacrifice from women while denying them opportunities for personal autonomy. Through feminist literary criticism, the analysis reveals how motherhood functions as a socially constructed institution that regulates female identity and reinforces gender hierarchies. The postcolonial perspective further illustrates that these expectations remain deeply connected to historical and cultural narratives that continue to shape contemporary Indian society.

The psychological analysis highlights the intergenerational transmission of trauma, showing how unresolved emotional

wounds influence successive mother-daughter relationships. Doshi's fragmented narrative structure and symbolic imagery effectively represent the instability of memory and identity, reinforcing the novel's central argument that motherhood cannot be reduced to simplistic moral categories. Instead, it emerges as an evolving negotiation between personal desire, cultural obligation, and emotional inheritance.

The findings of this study also open possibilities for future research. Comparative analyses with other contemporary Indian women novelists, interdisciplinary studies incorporating trauma psychology and medical humanities, and investigations into memory, ageing, and female subjectivity could further expand scholarly understanding of maternal representation in modern literature. As debates surrounding gender, family, and identity continue to evolve, *Burnt Sugar* remains an important literary text that encourages readers to rethink motherhood beyond inherited cultural myths and toward a more inclusive understanding of women's lived realities.

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